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Bosses kill 6,000 workers a day

One death every 15 seconds. Six thousand a day. Work kills more people than wars. And it injures and mutilates, too. Almost 270 million workplace "accidents" are recorded each year, of which 350,000 are fatal. The International Labour Organization estimates that 2.2 million people (22,000 of them children) die from work-related causes every year, but says the statistics likely underestimate the real situation, given inadequate reporting in many countries.

April 28 is Workers Memorial Day

Work causes injuries, mutilations, sickness and, still all too often, death. Not by fate, but through negligence. Not because of poverty, but because of the lack of preventive measures. Most workplace deaths around the world are due to work-related illnesses, typically caused by exposure to toxic chemicals and other substances. Exposure to chemicals is also blamed for 35 million of the 160 million cases of occupational sickness recorded worldwide.

As ILO staffers emphasize, "even though there is no such thing as zero risk, work accidents must not be seen as fated. They don't just happen. They are caused." The causes are many and varied, but they all come down to negligence: by unscrupulous employers who, in the name of profit, begrudge every penny spent on safety; by governments who do not enforce health and safety laws; and, sometimes, by workers themselves, usually due to a lack of training and information.

Millions of workers around the world are still exposed to asbestos, which kills more than 100,000 people each year. "Asbestos is already banned in 25 countries, but that means that almost 150 other ones are still using it," points out Jukka Takala, who heads the ILO's occupational health and safety work.

"One of the trends is that industrialized countries are exporting their hazards to developing countries," Takala says. "Labour there is not only cheaper but also significantly less protected. Dirty and difficult jobs are left to the South." So while mining diseases including silicosis have virtually disappeared in industrialized countries, they still claim fresh victims every day in the developing world. For instance, 10 million workers are at risk from silicosis, and the death-dealing dust causes 5,000 fatalities every year. In Vietnam, it is the source of 90 percent of compensated occupational illnesses. In India, more than two million miners are exposed to this hazard. Plus six million in Brazil and almost two million in Colombia. In Latin America, according to an ILO report, 37 percent of miners suffer from silicosis – a figure that rises to 50 percent for miners aged over 50.

While many employers and governments claim they can not afford safe working conditions, the cost of caring for the victims and cleaning up after catastrophes is much higher. The ILO estimates that 4 percent of world production – 1,000 billion dollars, 20 times as much as all aid to developing countries – is spent each year dealing with the consequences of unsafe workplaces.

Unions around the world have made corporate responsibility a main theme of the annual International Day for Dead and Injured Workers, on April 28. "We want to see more serious penalties imposed on employers who violate safety measures," says the International Federation of Building and Wood Workers. Its sectors *continued page 6*

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Mexican teachers' union faces criminalization

BY CHARLES BEAUBIEN

Rural teachers in the state of Guanajuato have organized an independent union with inspiring courage. In an effort to improve the quality of education for students, secure needed benefits for themselves, and stop gender discrimination, this far-flung assortment of high school and university-level teachers took on both the state government and two illegitimate unions started by their employer, the SABES education program. Their struggle, which started in 2003, has seen both significant victories and foreboding developments.

"One of the principal motivations that I had for getting involved with this work was during one of the vacation periods one of my colleagues died. The SABES program would take no responsibility for helping out the family financially… They said since it was during this vacation period, 'he wasn't working; we have no responsibility.' Through union pressure they were able, three months after the fact, to get the program to help out for the funeral," explains Monserrat Banda, one of 27 rural teachers fired for their leadership in the teachers' union.

Banda's union, SITESABES, is affiliated with Mexico's Authentic Labor Front (FAT), a democratic federation with enemies in business, government and the corrupt "charro" unions. FAT-affiliated organizations battle Mexico's notoriously corrupt company unions in nearly every industry.

Guanajuato's teachers fare no better.

"We're really fighting against this charro union because we want to create an independent union. But they are trying to cut off the head, the leadership, of the independent union so that the fight will just stop," says Banda. Monserrat and other sacked teachers now travel around Guanajuato organizing other SABES teachers and campaigning all over Mexico and the United States.

Building a social base among rural Mexicans has been key to their organizing. "The students and parents need to know what's going on. When we have actions, and talking with the government, they always come with us ... for support," explains Banda. SITESABES would do two actions in a day so that teachers and students could continue with school in the morning while some were rallying. Later, they would switch for another rally. "The unity of the students and the parents is very important," Monserrat emphasizes.

el Registro Sindical

Guanajuato's government now intends to yank the registration of the teachers' independent union. "If they take away the registration, a union cannot function in Mexico. It would cease to function," Banda says. "It's so important because it would set a precedent for the nation. Guanajuato has been a laboratory where they try new programs out… Then they spread it to the whole country."

Monserrat Banda spoke in Portland as part of a West Coast tour organized with the help of En Lace, a cross-border workers' organization. Through their relationship to the FAT, En Lace coordinator Peter Cervantes-Gautschi and other American unionists have *continued on page 9*

Philly retail workers build solidarity union

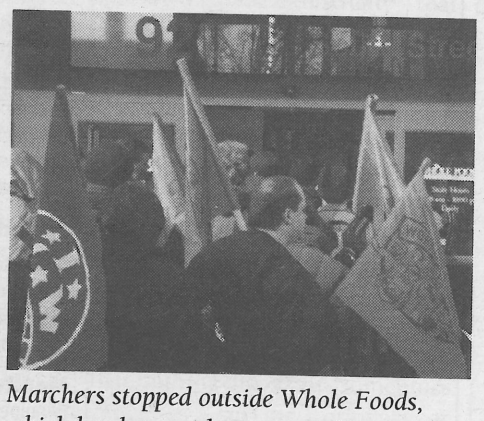
The IWW-affiliated South Street Workers Union is organizing retail and food service workers along Philadelphia's South Street corridor, implementing a model of solidarity unionism focused on helping workers create their own shop floor and district-wide organizations to confront low wages, poor working conditions, and the lack of workplace rights.

Since the union began organizing in August 2003, the South Street Workers Union has organized health, tax and workers' rights clinics; social events; a district-wide grievance committee that has helped workers claim unpaid wages and develop strategies to improve working conditions; and organized a campaign against proposed mass transit fare increases and service cutbacks.

Seventy union members and supporters marched down South Street Feb. 27, demanding support for mass transportation funding – culminating a two-week campaign in which they approached business owners along the strip asking them to sign a letter to the legislature demanding adequate transit funding.

The SEPTA system faced a $49 million budget shortfall, which it planned to meet by raising cash fares from $2 to $2.50 (on the way to $3), and slashing night and weekend service. The cuts and fare hikes were averted the next day when the governor diverted highway funds to cover operating expenses through June.

Marchers stopped at five of the seven South Street businesses that had refused to sign the letter, gaining two more signatures to bring the total to 99. The march ended with a short rally where the letters were delivered



Marchers stopped outside Whole Foods, which has harassed union members and refused to support transit funding.

to State Rep. Babette Josephs, who told the crowd that as the only member of the legislature who didn't own a car, she recognized the importance of mass transit.

"If we saw this kind of protest in every shopping district," she added, "the legislature would find a way to solve the transit crisis."

South Street workers depend on mass transit, delegate Andrew Rothman noted, adding that proposed fare increases "would be devastating to people who are living at or below the poverty line." Marchers echoed that sentiment, chanting "Raise our wages, not the fares."

The march was covered by three television stations and in the *Philadelphia Inquirer.*

The South Street Workers Union's next event is a tax clinic, where accountants will be on hand to help workers prepare tax returns and claim the earned income credit many are entitled to because of their low earnings.

Most South Street workers earn little *continued on page 9*

Fighting baseball sweatshops

Regular readers of the *Industrial Worker* receive the best Major League Sweatshop Baseball news, and, in the opinion of many baseball fans, the best overall monthly sweatshop news in any publication. The Pittsburgh Anti-Sweatshop Community Alliance lifts its collective baseball cap to Jon Bekken and the numerous contributors to this coverage. Steve O of the San Francisco General Membership Branch has put many hours into compiling mainstream press and other first-hand reports on iww.org. Thank you. These are invaluable resources.



Home Openers will be played just days after you receive this *IW* in the mail. The ticket sales marketing campaign and the saturation of our communities with baseball logos will only peak around the time of the All Star Game in July, and then it will remain steady through the World Series. Baseball and Sweatshops – Peanuts and Cracker Jacks.

We can help set wage disclosure and certified payroll as the new industry reporting standards. We can present workers' rights violations in baseball sweatshops to our teams. We have to load the bases and hit some home runs. Each inning has to be a grand slam for workers' rights this baseball season.

• Be a Major League Sweatshop Educator yourself.

• Greg Georgio, member of the Upstate General Membership Branch of IWW, editor of the *Black Cat Moans*, and member of the IWW International Solidarity Committee, is coordinating actions amongst sweatfree baseball campaigners in several cities. Please mail him your home team baseball schedule and request copies of the new *Black Cat Moans*. Cooperstown, NY, the home of baseball and the Major League Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, is the most appropriate place in the world to coordinate our activities.

• Help us create the fourth edition of Major League Sweatshop Baseball Cards. This is a big initiative for our Major League Sweatshop Education – our best shot putting sweatshop education into a baseball genre. "It's the Global Economy on Steroids." Baseball cards have charts and photos and cartoons. Baseball cards are for baseball fans all over the world. We hope to have the fourth edition to distribute at PNC Park and many other ball parks on May Day.

• Help maintain the sweatfree baseball web site. Steve O has been a tremendous help, but he is the iww.org webmaster and we cannot expect him to do the electronic work of sweatfree baseball forever. If you have web skills and some time to help, this is a great way to step up to bat.

• Translation help. Bengali in particular.

• Be skeptical and questioning and demanding of our campaign. There are all kinds of concerns about how a campaign like ours should be conducted. Workers always have to prioritize calls for solidarity from all over the world and with the drive to organize our own communities.

• Join the SweatFree Baseball Campaign list serve. This is a high volume list serve, but you can choose to receive digests or just be able to access the list serves web site to check messages and find electronic files of our press releases, letters and petitions to the Pirates, and communications with workers from all over the world. Sweatfree_baseball_campaign-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

• Attend *any* sweatshop solidarity event and send reports to the *IW*. Get the testimony of workers in the global apparel industry.

Kenneth Miller, Pittsburgh

Iraq & Syria

Iraq and Syria are large produce-growing nations, according to the *Statesman Yearbook 2005*. This goes back to the expansion of railroads into the Ottoman Empire in the 1880s – 10 years after the refrigerated railroad car and cargo ship came into use.

Is it just by accident that these same nations are now targets of the U.S. at a time when we are trying to suppress the farm workers' movement in this country?

Robert G. Rice II, St. Louis

Starvation amidst plenty

I've heard Noam Chomsky talk about the many close calls we've had with nuclear weapons, with the world saved by minutes. In one case a flock of geese fooled our radar, and we nearly let the missiles fly. What would have been humanity's epitaph? "Oops!" And would it truly have been an accident?

I've seen these "aid" programs on TV, someplace in Northern Africa... The place looks like a gravel pit. The mothers with no milk in their breasts for their babies; kids crying, flies crawling on their faces. Every day, 40,000 children die of preventable causes. Meanwhile, other folks are buying $45,000 wrist watches and such.

It is this extreme inequality that necessitates nuclear weapons. As long as there is war, there will be nations seeking nuclear weapons. The more nations that acquire them, the greater the chance that they'll be used.

I suffer from depression. What I wonder tonight is, is that normal? Maybe people who aren't depressed are abnormal.

Are the lunatics running the asylum? Does the head nut (George W. Bush) have the keys to the bus, a bottle of whisky in one hand, steering wheel in the other, taking us 90 mph the wrong way down a one-way street?

Joe Randell, Bellingham WA

Correction

Last issue we reported, based on an article from the British *Daily Telegraph*, that German authorities were requiring women to consider job offers from brothels and similar establishments or risk loss of unemployment benefits. That report was based upon a mistranslation of an article from a German newspaper which raised this as a future possibility.

Farewell, Fellow Worker
Bob Calese

Robert S. Calese died Dec. 18, at age 78. He held IWW membership for several years and worked as a jazz trombonist (playing with Fletcher Henderson and Lenny Tristano) and librarian. A World War II vet who slogged through Germany, he was active in the War Resisters League and worked with Sam Dolgoff in the Libertarian League. FW Calese wrote for the *Industrial Worker* and other publications, and preserved movement history with his writings and on reel-to-reel tapes that filled a wall of his apartment. He was also a dedicated jokester, and an enemy of generals, bureaucrats and humbug everywhere. He is survived by his wife, Phyllis Calese.

Alberta: Show us the money

The Edmonton IWW issued a Family Day statement Feb. 21, blasting Alberta Prime Minister Ralph Klein's economic policies. More than 140,000 workers make the province's minimum wage, at CAN$5.90 the lowest in Canada. Klein is considering an increase to $7, still far below what is needed to reach the national poverty level.

In addition to calling for a living wage with full benefits, Edmonton Wobblies demanded affordable public day care, and a living wage for the workers who provide it. They also called for elimination of all tuition charges to public colleges, and increased support for disabled workers, single-parent families, and others on social assistance.

May Day Greetings Ads

The May *IW* will feature a special section on the 100th anniversary of the founding of the IWW. Greeting Ads must be received by April 9. Suggested donation levels are $10 for a 1 inch tall ad (1 column wide); $35 for 4 inches by 4 7/8 inches (2 columns); or $80 for a quarter page. We can also provide extra copies of the issue at normal bundle rates.

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★ EDUCATION
★ EMANCIPATION

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Post Office Box 13476
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215.222.1905 • ghq@iww.org
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General Secretary-Treasurer: Alexis Buss

General Executive Board: Mark Damron (chair), Jim Crutchfield, Joshua Freeze, Heather Hall, Samara Paysee, Adam Welch, E. Wolfson

Editor: Jon Bekken
iw@iww.org

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IWW directory

Australia

IWW Regional Organising Committee PO Box 241, Surry Hills NSW 2010. phone: 0408 219663. email: roc@iww.org.au www.iww.org.au

British Isles

IWW Regional Organising Committee: PO Box 74, Brighton, E. Sussex, BN1 4ZQ, U.K., www.iww.org.uk, www.brightoniww.org.uk, email: brightoniww@yahoo.co.uk

Scotland: Clydeside GMB, iwwclydeside@mahost.org; web: iwwclydeside.mahost.org. Edinburgh: Eddie Murray, c/o ACE, 17 W. Montgomery Place, EH7 SHA, edinburghiww@yahoo.co.uk

Canada

Alberta

Edmonton GMB: PO Box 75175, T6E 6K1. email: edmonton@lists.iww.org http://edmonton.iww.ca

Manitoba

Winnipeg GMB: IWW, c/o WORC, PO Box 1, R3C 2G1. winnipegiww@hotmail.com. Garth Hardy, del., garth.hardy@union.org.za.

Ontario

Ottawa-Outaouais GMB: PO Box 52015, Ottawa K1N 7E7, (613) 241-0382. ott-out@iww.org French-language del: Mathieu Brúle parti_hardcore@yahoo.com

Peterborough IWW: c/o PCAP, 393 Water St. Unit 17, K9H 3L7. email: ptboiww@riseup.net

Thunder Bay IWW: c/o Indymedia, Suite 19c, 12 Court St. S., P7B 2W3. tbayiww@resist.ca

Germany

IWW Kontakts: Daniel Zimmermann, Kreuzstraße 17, D-47 226 Duisburg, wobbly@gmx.de; Norbert, iww-germany@gmx.net, http://de.groups.yahoo.com/group/IWW-Germany

Japan

Hokkaido: Braden Cannon, delegate, emak_bakia@hotmail.com

United States

Arizona

Phoenix GMB: 1205 E. Hubbell St., 85006-1758. 602-254-4057. Aaron Rothenburger, del., 480-303-9580.

Arkansas

Fayetteville: PO Box 283, 72702. 479-299-1859, nwar_iww@hotmail.com.

California

Los Angeles GMB: PO Box 91691, Pasadena 91109. 323-682-4143. lagmb@iww.org

San Francisco Bay Area GMB: (Curbside and Buyback IU 670 Recycling Shops; Stonemountain IU 660 Job Shop) PO Box 11412, Berkeley 94712. 415-863-WOBS. Meetings 1st & 3rd Thursdays at 7 p.m. (2022 Blake St., Berkeley)

San Jose: Adam Welch, del. pager: 408-795-9672 email: adam_freedom@yahoo.com

Santa Barbara GMB: PO Box 23008, 93121. 805-689-3086, sbgmb@iww.org

Stockton Rail Truckers IU 530: c/o San Jose.

Colorado

Denver GMB: c/o P&L Printing Job Shop: 2298 Clay, Denver 80211. 303-433-1852.

Four Corners (AZ, CO, NM, UT): delegate: 970-903-8721. 4corners@iww.org

Florida

Pensacola GMB: PO Box 12311, 32591-2311. Delegates: Steve Winfrey or Scott Satterwhite. iwwpensacola@yahoo.com

Hobe Sound: Peter Shultz, 8274 SE Pine Circle, 33455-6608, 772-545-9591, okiedogg2002@yahoo.com

Hawai'i

Honolulu: Tony Donnes, del., 808-547-2042. donnes@hawaii.edu

Illinois

Chicago GMB & General Defense Committee

Local 3: PO Box 18387, 3750 N. Kedzie, 60618. phone/fax: 815-550-2018.

Champaign: David Johnson, 217-356-8247.

Waukegan IWW: PO Box 507, 60079. waukeganiww@iww.org

Kansas

Lawrence GMB: 300 W 14th St., 66044. 785-865-1374. lawrenceiww@hotmail.com.

Maine

Norumbega GMB: Barry Rodrigue, del., 75 Russell St., Bath 04530.

Maryland

Baltimore IWW: c/o Red Emma's, 800 St. Paul St., 21202, 410-230-0450, iww@redemmas.org.

Massachusetts

Boston Area GMB: PO Box 391724, Cambridge 02139. 617-469-5162.

Western Mass. Public Service Workers IU 650 Branch: IWW, PO Box 1581, Northampton 01061.

Western Massachusetts GMB: 43 Taylor Hill Rd., Montague 01351. 413-367-9356.

Michigan

Detroit GMB: 8916 Royce Drive, Sterling Heights 48313. eljoyce@hotmail.com

Grand Rapids GMB: PO Box 6629, 49516. Matthew Clark, 616-459-8090. griww@iww.org

Central Michigan: David Finet, 5007 W. Columbia Rd., Mason 48854. 517-676-9446, happyhippie66@hotmail.com

Minnesota

Duluth GMB: c/o Laverne Capan, 1522 N 8th Ave E, 55805-1115. 218-724-2647.

Missouri

Kansas City GMB: c/o 5506 Holmes St., 64110. sherrimichelle@hotmail.com. 816-523-3995.

Montana

Construction Workers IU 330: Dennis Georg, del. 406-494-5837, trampiu330@aol.com

New Jersey

Central New Jersey GMB: R. Ted Nebus, del., newbrunsnj@iww.org.

New Mexico

Albuquerque: PO Box 4352, 87196. 505-268-1571 abq@iww.org

New York

NYC GMB: PO Box 7430, JAF Station, New York City 10116, iww-nyc@bari.iww.org. Jim Crutchfield, I.U. 650, G.E.B. member, classify@iww.org.

Upstate NY GMB: PO Box 74, Altamont 12009. 518-861-5627, therev@capital.net. Rochelle Semel, del, PO Box 172, Fly Creek 13337, 607-293-6489, rochelle7@usadatanet.net.

North Carolina

New Bern: Bruce Arnold, del., 1350 Trent Blvd #Q-4, 28560.

Ohio

Ohio Valley GMB: Mark Damron, del., PO Box 42233, Cincinnati 45242.

Ohio River Valley IU 660: PO Box 317741, Cincinnati 45231, iu660cincy@hotmail.com. Steve Succop, del., ssuccop@netscape.net.

Oklahoma

Tulsa: Karl Howeth, 6189 W 11th Place, 74127. 918-499-3977 vaneigem25@hotmail.com

Oregon

Portland Industrial District Council: (Restaurant Workers IU640, Public Service Workers IU650) **Union Hall:** 616 E. Burnside St., 97214, 503-231-5488. **IU 650 Secretary:** Lupin, 503-209-4679, workingclassgrrl@hotmail.com.

Pennsylvania

Lancaster GMB: PO Box 796, 17608

Philadelphia GMB: PO Box 42777, 19101. 215-222-1905. phillyiww@iww.org Union Hall: 4530 Baltimore Ave., 19143. South Street Workers Union /Workers Rights Hotline 215-990-8250.

Paper Crane Press IU 450 Job Shop: papercranepress@erols.com, 610-358-9496.

Pittsburgh GMB: 139 Rossmore St., East Pittsburgh 15112. pittsburghiww@yahoo.com

Texas

Austin GMB: PO Box 650011, 78765. 512-467-7320 waterloowob@monkeywrenchbooks.org

Utah

Salt Lake City GMB: PO Box 520835, 84152-0835. slcgmb@iww.org 801-485-1969.

Washington

Industrial Transportation Project: Arthur J Miller, PO Box 5464, Tacoma 98415-0464.

Olympia GMB: PO Box 2775, 98507. 360-956-9256. olywobs@riseup.net

Seattle GMB: 1122 E. Pike #1142, 98122-3934. 877-815-5684, seattle@iww.org, www.seattleiww.org. John Persak, General Distribution IU660: bp172@scn.org.

Spokane: Tim Hill, 509-218-9622.

Wisconsin

Madison GMB: PO Box 2442, 53703-2442. **Lakeside Press IU 450 Job Shop:** 1334 Williamson, Madison 53703. 608-255-1800. **Madison Infoshop Job Shop**: 1019 Williamson St. #B, 53703. 608-262-9036.

Railroad Workers IU 520: PO Box 3010, Madison 53704, baltimored1@yahoo.com.

Milwaukee GMB: PO Box 070632, 53207. 414-481-3557.

Pensacola GMB joins global day of action against Caterpillar

BY LAUREN ANZALDO

Florida Wobblies will participate in a national day of action April 18 against heavy-equipment manufacturer Caterpillar Inc. by sending letters to the company's board of directors and the United Auto Workers, which represents Caterpillar workers and retirees.

Letters to the UAW national headquarters and locals that represent Caterpillar workers will inform the workers that there is an ongoing national campaign protesting CAT's sale of bulldozers to the Israeli military. Letters to CAT board members will urge a halt of Caterpillar sales to Israel.

Human-rights activists have waged a multifaceted, three-year-long campaign demanding that CAT stop selling armored bulldozers to the Israeli military. April 13 has been declared a Day of Action Against Caterpillar. Caterpillar shareholders will meet that day in Chicago and will discuss a resolution filed by California-based Jewish Voice for Peace asking CAT to review whether its sales of equipment to the Israeli army violates the corporation's own Code of Worldwide Business Conduct.

CAT equipment is sold to Israel under the U.S. Foreign Military Sales Program, which makes it illegal for U.S.-purchased equipment to be used to violate human rights. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have documented the use of CAT bulldozers in human-rights violations, including the destruction of Palestinian homes and agricultural land.

From September 2000 to November 2004, at least 4,100 Palestinian homes have been razed by CAT bulldozers and at least 28,000 Palestinians rendered homeless, according to the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem (www.btselem.org). Bulldozers have uprooted an estimated 1 million olive and fruit trees and destroyed thousands of acres of farmland. Agriculture is the primary source of income for most Palestinians.

For more information about the Caterpillar Campaign and the April 13 Day of Action, visit www.catdestroyshomes.org, www.stopcat.org or www.endtheoccupation.org.

Taco Bell boycott ends

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers announced the end of its Taco Bell boycott after parent company Yum! Brands agreed to force its suppliers to pay a penny-per-pound more on Florida tomatoes. They also made a commitment to improve conditions on the fields. The three-year boycott campaign included hunger strikes, work-stoppages, and tours, as well as the international boycott.

Taco Bell's tomato supplier, 4 I's Packing, had been paying tomato pickers the same low piece-rate, 10 cents per pound, since 1980. These farm workers live in squalid trailers, and work 12-hour days. A penny a pound is enough to nearly double pickers' wages.

French Fry workers go IWW

Workers at Pomme Frite, a french fry joint in Chico, California, have joined the IWW. Delegate Trenton Reich says their boss "signed our letter asking for recognition with no fuss." The workers hope that as a union they can preserve what they consider to be an excellent work situation. Pomme Frite workers control their own schedules, and so long as the fries are made the boss gives them no hassles. These new Wobs are also active in organizing in downtown Chico.

Madison coffee shop lines up

Workers at Madison's new worker-owned coffee shop, Two Degrees, have joined the union and applied for an IWW shop card.

Madison Wobs have formed a General Distribution Workers Industrial Union 660 organizing committee which is reaching out to food service and retail workers as the city implements a new living wage ordinance.

Brooklyn coffee shop goes Wobbly!

BY BENJAMIN FERGUSON

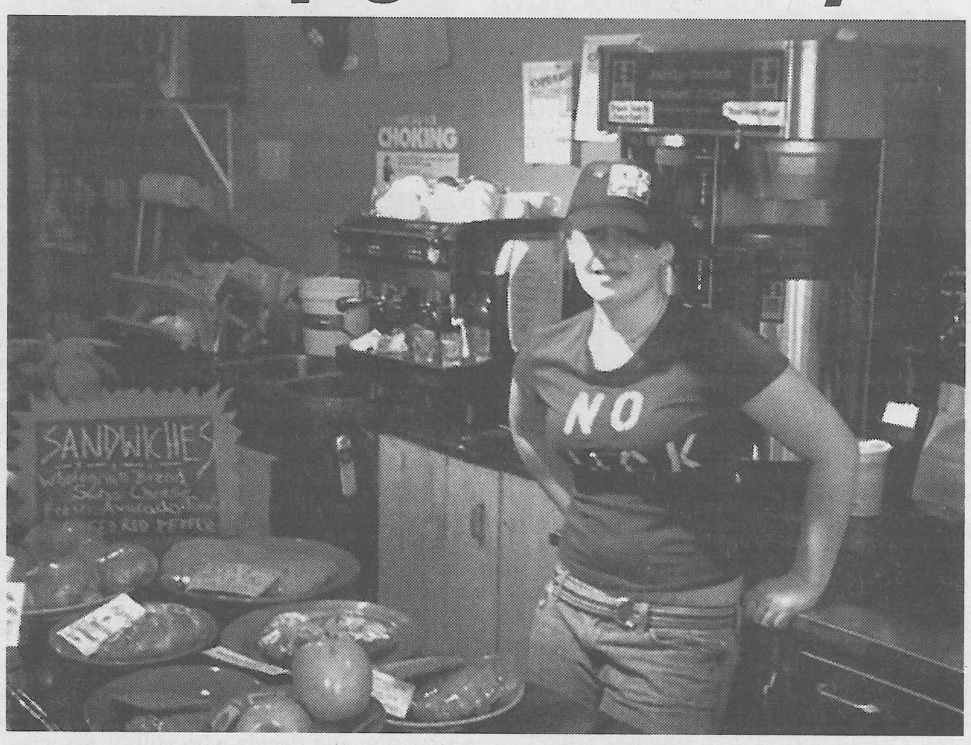
Life in Brooklyn, New York, just got better. The newest IWW job shop has appeared in Flatbush, Brooklyn, and all six workers hold red cards.

Open since November 2004, the Vox Pop serves up far more than just coffee and snacks; it carries a fine selection of rebellious books (plus a print-on-demand publishing house), activist t-shirts, and internet service. And according to the sign outside, they're also serving up 'democracy.'

The Vox Pop also hosts live music, performance art & poetry readings. During my visit I tasted my first cup of union joe, and can promise you: it was DEEElicious!

"Vox Pop workers decided we wanted to take the shop's motto of democracy to its fullest extent," said worker Emmy Gilbert (pictured to the right). "And the IWW doesn't think organizing retail is futile."

Vox Pop is the first IWW-organized retail coffee shop in recent years, and now serves the first-ever free-trade, union-served coffee in New York.



exclusively fair trade products.

Starbucks opposed at Trent U

BY PAUL BOCKING

Students and local Wobblies initiated a campaign against the establishment of a Starbucks outlet at Trent University in Peterborough, Ontario. Hundreds of posters and leaflets were put up and distributed around the university, exposing the reality behind the facade of a "socially responsible employer."

They highlighted Starbuck's vehemently anti-union reaction to the organizing of Starbucks workers in New York City with the IWW. Comparisons were also made in presentations and public discussions on the disparity between Starbucks CEO Howard Shultz's salary and the average wage of a farm worker picking coffee beans.

As an alternative, students submitted a proposal to the university for the establishment of a cooperatively run cafe serving

Pizza Time workers still out

Workers remain on strike at the Olympia, Washington, Pizza Time restaurant after negotiations collapsed March 1. Richard Kelley repeatedly denied being the owner, but said he would not reopen unless workers abandon their demands for better working conditions and agree to "donate their time" to make Pizza Time more profitable.

He added that any losses caused by the strike would be withheld from workers' wages. For example, he suggested, inside workers might be paid for seven of every ten hours worked while delivery drivers would "have to live on tips." Before the strike, the highest paid workers earned $7.50 an hour.

Shane Bloking also denies owning the business. Both Bloking and Kelley continue to refuse to recognize the Olympia Workers' Association as the workers' union, and workers have petitioned for an NLRB election.

New York Wobs back call for March 19 anti-war protests

The New York City Branch endorsed a call by the War Resisters League for nonviolent direct actions at military recruitment centers March 19, marking the second anniversary of the invasion of Iraq.

The branch adopted a resolution "urg[ing] working men and women in Iraq, the United States, and in all countries, to organize and strike, or to re-direct their labor in any way that will impede the war effort. We urge military personnel to recognize that they, too, are working people, who are being ordered to kill and maim their fellow workers.

"Only when working people from around the world come together, recognize our common bonds and common masters, and lay down our tools and arms, will the twin yokes of militarism and capitalism be thrown off our shoulders, and the workers of the world ... live in peace with each other and in harmony with the earth."

Preamble to the IWW Constitution

The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life.

Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the means of production, abolish the wage system, and live in harmony with the earth.

We find that the centering of the management of industries into fewer and fewer hands makes the trade unions unable to cope with the ever-growing power of the employing class. The trade unions foster a state of affairs which allows one set of workers to be pitted against another set of workers in the same industry, thereby helping defeat one another in wage wars. Moreover, the trade unions aid the employing class to mislead the workers into the belief that the working class have interests in common with their employers.

These conditions can be changed and the interest of the working class upheld only by an organization formed in such a way that all its members in any one industry, or all industries if necessary, cease work whenever a strike or lockout is on in any department thereof, thus making an injury to one an injury to all.

Instead of the conservative motto, "A fair day's wage for a fair day's work," we must inscribe on our banner the revolutionary watchword, "Abolition of the wage system."

It is the historic mission of the working class to do away with capitalism. The army of production must be organized, not only for the everyday struggle with capitalists, but also to carry on production when capitalism shall have been overthrown. By organizing industrially we are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old.

Join the IWW Today

The IWW is a union for all workers, a union dedicated to organizing on the job, in our industries and in our communities both to win better conditions today and to build a world without bosses, a world in which production and distribution are organized by workers ourselves to meet the needs of the entire population, not merely a handful of exploiters.

We are the Industrial Workers of the World because we organize industrially – that is to say, we organize all workers on the job into one union, rather than dividing workers by trade, so that we can pool our strength to fight the bosses together.

Since the IWW was founded in 1905, we have recognized the need to build a truly international union movement in order to confront the global power of the bosses and in order to strengthen workers' ability to stand in solidarity with our fellow workers no matter what part of the globe they happen to live on.

We are a union open to all workers, whether or not the IWW happens to have representation rights in your workplace. We organize the worker, not the job, recognizing that unionism is not about government certification or employer recognition but about workers coming together to address our common concerns. Sometimes this means striking or signing a contract. Sometimes it means refusing to work with an unsafe machine or following the bosses' orders so literally that nothing gets done. Sometimes it means agitating around particular issues or grievances in a specific workplace, or across an industry.

Because the IWW is a democratic, member-run union, decisions about what issues to address and what tactics to pursue are made by the workers directly involved.

TO JOIN: Mail this form with a check or money order for initiation and your first month's dues to: IWW, Post Office Box 13476, Philadelphia, PA 19101.

Initiation is the same as one month's dues. Our dues are calculated according to your income. If your monthly income is under $1,000, dues are $6 a month. If your monthly income is between $1,000 - $2,000, dues are $12 a month. If your monthly income is over $2,000 a month, dues are $18 a month.

- ❑ I affirm that I am a worker, and that I am not an employer
- ❑ I agree to abide by the IWW constitution
- ❑ I will study its principles and make myself acquainted with its purposes.



Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Occupation: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Amount Enclosed: _____

Membership includes a subscription to the Industrial Worker.

Edmonton Wobs picket CLAC company union

The Edmonton General Membership Branch organized a March 4 picket in front of the offices of the Christian Labour Association of Canada to protest their sweetheart deal to contract out work from the IAM-organized Finning plant in Edmonton to shops in Nisku "organized" by CLAC.

Finning workers have lost 240 jobs over the last eight months to this deal, and many believe the company is trying to provoke a strike in order to lock everyone out.

CLAC signs sweetheart contracts with employers, raids other unions, and encourages workers to think of their employers as "friends"; as we all know, nothing could be further from the truth. All cooperation between workers and bosses can mean is a worse deal for workers. They were founded by the Christian Reformed Church, many of their key figures fled South Africa after the fall of apartheid.

Members of several Edmonton-area unions joined the IWW on the picket line to draw attention to CLAC's disgusting collaboration with the bosses.

The Edmonton IWW distributed a leaflet titled CLAC Attack at the action. Excerpts follow: "As an evangelical Christian labour association, CLAC believes in giving unto Caesar what is Caesars. They do not promote workers rights but the belief that workers should supplicate themselves before the boss cap in hand and ask 'please sir can I 'ave some more.'

"Is CLAC a union?

"NO. It is an association, and as such has spent the past 50 years trying to get recognized as a union by provincial and federal labour relations boards. ... When they approach and employer they do not act on behalf of the workers but begin negotiations as labour management consultants. Their approach is to offer the boss a docile bargaining agent on behalf of his employees. The boss and CLAC then promote the association to the employees as a 'union,' one that is approved of by the employer. ...

"CLAC promotes the idea not only of the open shop, where you don't have to be a union member to get a job, but also getting rid of the Rand Formula where once a union has 51% of the employees' support all employees are represented by the union. ...

"Workers in a CLAC association are 'represented' by consultants, who run the association and decide who will be association representatives. There is no trade union democracy in CLAC. Member pay dues but have no say in how the Association runs. CLAC is anti-democratic.

"The majority of CLAC's members in Alberta come from workplaces certified through voluntary recognition. That means that nobody in these workplaces ever voted to certify CLAC as the union – nobody except CLAC itself and the employer, that is." Kerry Barrett, president, Alberta Federation of Labour.

"In Alberta CLAC has been the 'union' of choice of the Merit Shops, the non-union construction industry in the province. CLAC likes Merit Shops and represents several of them.

"They also represent workers at SaveOn Foods. They have a sweetheart deal with born-again Christian Jim Pattison who owns SaveOn Foods. Pattison wanted CLAC in so he could keep UFCW out.

"The Alberta government has changed the Labour Relations Act to allow the Horizon Oil Sands Project to be non union, and allow for importing cheap labour from abroad. Horizon has a deal with CLAC to represent these non union workers."

Another picket will be held March 18.

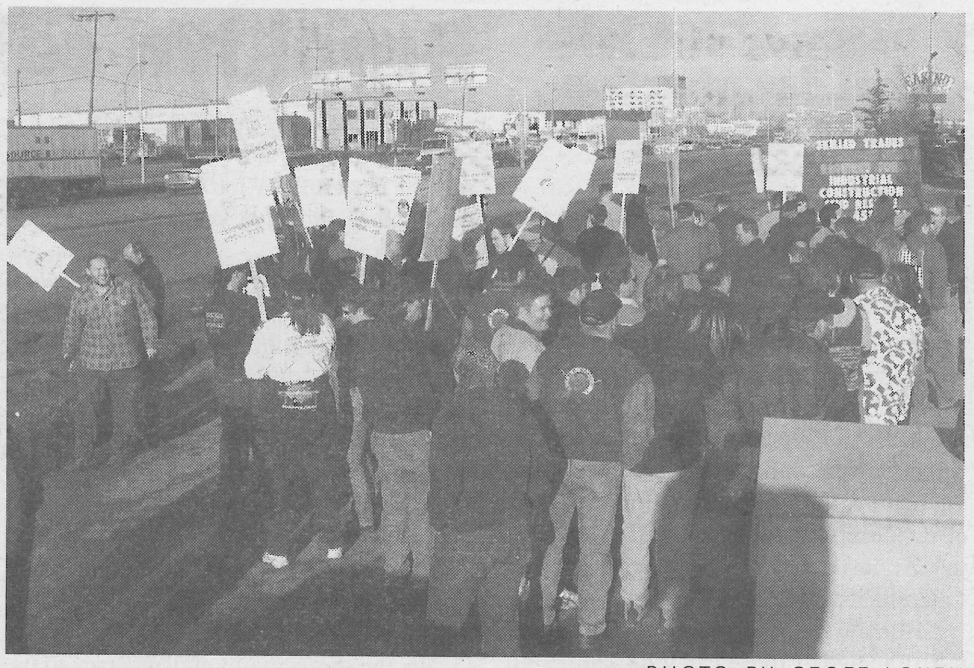


PHOTO BY GEOFF LOKEN

Seventy people joined the March 4 picket line in front of the CLAC offices, including members of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, CUPE, International Association of Machinists, and of course the IWW.

Virtual worlds, real exploitation

BY ERIC LEE

"A child of 5 would understand this. Send someone to fetch a child of 5." – Groucho Marx

Seriously, if you were born before 1985, you might have some problems understanding this. So let me start at the beginning.

There is a phenomenon called online gaming. Simply put, you combine computer games with the Internet, allowing you to interact with other people who are online at the same time. Many of these games are known as MMORPGs, which stands for massive(ly) multiplayer online role-playing games.

Some of the more popular MMORPGs include Ultima Online, EverQuest, City of Heroes, Dark Age of Camelot, World of Warcraft, and Runescape. They often have magical themes involving wizards and monsters.

Many of the games have hundreds of thousands of subscribed players who pay fees to use them. (Some of the games are free to play.) There are an estimated 27 million players of such games today, one third of them in South Korea.

So far, you must be thinking: what possible connection could this have to the union movement? Be patient – we're getting to that.

In these games, as in many computer games, over time one acquires possessions, skills, rank and so on. Often, moving on in the game is a long, slow tedious process – and many computer gamers look for short-cuts to get beyond the lower levels of the game.

In MMORPGs, those shortcuts might involve getting hold of objects (including virtual money) from other players. Those objects can be traded. Which means that outside of the virtual worlds, trading can also take place. Many players seem willing to part with their cash (real-world cash, that is) in order to buy virtual objects in the games.

This activity made headlines in December 2004 when a 22-year-old Australian gamer spent $26,500 (real money) to buy a virtual island in the online game Project Entropia. This was no ordinary island. According to the game developers, "The island boasts beautiful beaches ripe for developing beachfront



property, an old volcano with rumors of fierce creatures within, the outback is overrun with mutants, and an area with a high concentration of robotic miners guarded by heavily armed assault robots indicates interesting mining opportunities."

"This is a historic moment in gaming history, and this sale only goes to prove that massive multi-player online gaming has reached a new plateau," said a spokesman for the company behind the game.

Meanwhile, eBay, the online auction service, is filled with people buying and selling virtual objects for use in online games. Some game companies, such as Sony, which is behind EverQuest, forbid players from buying or selling game characters, items or currency, and have moved to block the sale of such items on eBay.

So far, it all sounds pretty crazy, but where's the relevance to trade unions?

According to the BBC, the problem begins with something called "grinding." This is a process in which "gamers have to perform long-winded, mindless tasks, to bring up their levels and gain access to more adventure." And this problem has created a market, and an opportunity for profit.

If you were to go online, join in one of these games, over time you'd advance, acquire objects, and these would have value to other players – especially those who wanted to avoid those "long-winded, mindless tasks." You could sell those objects, either to your friends or players you've met in the game, or to online brokers, or via eBay. In fact, you could hire people to play such games on your behalf for hours on end, and you could sell what they have acquired. If you employed those people in countries with very low incomes, in countries with weak or non-existent unions, you could make bigger profits. Get the idea?

According to an article by Tim Guest in the *Telegraph Magazine,* in mainland China "people are employed to play the games nine to five, scoring virtual booty which IGE [Internet Gaming Entertainment] can sell on at a profit to Western buyers.

China, as is known, has no free trade unions which makes it easy to pay sweatshop wages (though IGE insists it is not running a sweatshop). Tony Thompson, writing for *The Observer,* investigated a California-based company, Gamersloot.net, which employs Romanians to play MMORPGs for ten hours a day, earning $5.40 – 54 cents per hour.

When you visit the web site of gamersloot.net, you won't find any mention of virtual sweatshops in Romania, China or anywhere else. The site bills itself as "a central location to purchase or trade online game cd-keys, accounts, gold, items, and powerleveling services," whatever that means. The company says very little about itself, except that it is soliciting investors – and hopes to work with a children's charity. Not a word about the "loot" it has acquired, where it comes from, etc.

Internet Gaming Entertainment, whose web site is at http://www.ige.com, touts itself as a place to "buy gaming currency, items, accounts, and more." Its web site is a little bit more revealing about where the virtual currency it is selling comes from: "The stock we have available has been purchased legitimately from game players the world over who chose to sell their excess." Presumably, these are the people working in virtual sweatshops in Romania, China and elsewhere.

As massively multiplayer gaming takes off (and broadband Internet is driving this), the market for virtual products will hugely increase. Which means that more and more people will be employed to play these games in low-wage, union-free countries.

That's why this is going to become an issue for unionists. Fortunately, there is a difference between these virtual sweatshops and those producing, say, toys or garments. The virtual sweatshops creating objects for sale to online gamers are themselves online. The workers are using the Internet every minute they work, and they probably need a certain proficiency with English in order to play the games. This could make them targets of online, global organizing drives.

ILWU to strike port of Vancouver over "security" blacklist

BY 355424, VANCOUVER

Vancouver members of the ILWU are prepared to strike if the federal government doesn't stop implementing a set of draconian "security background checks" on workers. The Vancouver local has pointed out that these checks have precious little to do with enhancing safety on the waterfront. Instead, these intrusive checks are designed to harass and intimidate workers and their families with zero impact on security.

The program (officially called the Marine Facilities Restricted Area Access Clearance Program) gives sweeping powers to the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. They are now empowered to check friends, family members and anyone associated with people who work at the country's ports. Anyone who comes from Iran or Iraq, or if your spouse is from there, will probably be denied work. Ironically, security is, as the ILWU says, very weak along the waterfront.

Until recently, marine inspectors from the International Labor Organization were allowed onto ships, even those from the Third World. Shipowners who allowed illegal conditions would be punished, and workers were quite willing to expose narcotics and other smuggled items (including the occasional person). But no more. Now, the ports in Canada are openly inviting criminals. The ILWU wants the ILO inspectors back, and is still wondering why Ottawa continues to deny them access.

Of course, the ILWU will protest Ottawa's plans. But the employing class knows fully well that their profits and power won't be endangered at all. They simply have to use other ports other than Vancouver. There has always been a need for an One Big Union, but there are times when it is more urgent. Now is one such time.

Govt. auditors harass unions

Even as the federal government scales back enforcement of minimum wage, child labor, occupational safety and other laws supposed to protect workers' rights, it has unleashed an army of auditors to pry into unions' financial affairs.

The Bush administration has added nearly 100 positions since taking office, and increased the budget for the Office of Labor-Management Standards (which is also supposed to monitor union-busting consultants and enforce union democracy rights, but does not) by 60 percent. The OLMS now requires most unions to file much more detailed financial reports (far exceeding the requirements imposed on corporations), requiring unions to divert funds and energy from organizing and other projects to book-keeping.

Ohio news strikers face boss solidarity, union scabbing

BY JON BEKKEN

The publisher of the *Youngstown Vindicator* is benefitting from strong solidarity from his fellow bosses, even as union scabbing undercuts a strike by 170 members of the Newspaper Guild (CWA). Reporters and other editorial workers, classified advertising staff and circulation managers have been on strike since Nov. 16.

Five different newspaper chains are providing scab reporters and editors on two-week shifts. In addition to their regular paychecks, the scabs get $20 to $30 an hour for 60- to 80-hour work weeks – and free lodging, transportation and $75 a day for meals. One scab from a Newhouse paper says he made about $4,000 during his 14-day stint in Youngstown. Top pay for striking *Vindicator* reporters is $17.83 an hour.

Internet service provider godaddy.com took down the strikers' web site (www.valleyvoiceonline.com) after the *Vindicator* complained that it was publishing scabs' photos and email addresses. (The scabs, who do not sign their work, say they've been harassed.) Godaddy refused to restore the site until the union removed the scab hall of shame.

Although hundreds of unionists have joined protests outside the *Vindicator* offices, Youngstown Newspaper Guild Vice President Debora Shaulis Flora said, union members are printing the paper after rejecting the Guild's proposal for a joint union council. Members of the (now merged) GCIU and Teamsters unions had been working without a contract for a year when the Newspaper Guild contract expired. (Two typographers are also working under lifetime job guarantees.)

Instead of joining forces with the Guild, the pressmen's union settled shortly before the Guild and Teamsters (representing mailers) struck; the Teamsters agreed to concessions seven weeks into the strike. The Guild is leafletting businesses that continue to advertise in the struck paper, and encouraging readers to cancel their subscriptions to the *Vindicator*'s thin, error-filled scab papers.

The Guild is seeking to narrow the wage gap between part-time circulation staff (who start at $6.24 an hour) and the paper's $17.83 top scale; cap health care premium increases; and preserve seniority rights. The paper is demanding concessions that would hit the lower-paid circulation staff particularly hard, including requiring them to haul newspapers in their own cars. "This was an issue 40 years ago, and workers struck to win the right to company vehicles," Flora told the *Industrial Worker*. "Here we are 40 years later having to fight like hell to not lose that right."

The editorial staffers are "willing to stick it out to help the brothers and sisters in circulation who are really going to be hurt by this," Flora added. Only a dozen Guild members have crossed picket lines.

Solidarity Unionism

IN OUR HANDS IS PLACED A POWER GREATER THAN THEIR HOARDED GOLD

by Alexis Buss

Last month I spoke on a panel about the IWW's Centenary. Most of the people in the audience were staff and officers of union locals thoughout the U.S.. I spoke after two historians. I was the "modern-day" Wobbly.

As we celebrate our golden anniversary I think it's appropriate to bring to the table a mix of humility and pride. Who is the dinosaur? A 100-year old union whose members talk about a "back in the day" that nobody was actually alive for? Or is it the unions who can't come to grips with the reality that the bosses are simply shooing them aside?

* * *

I think the hope of solidarity unionism is that it situates our organizing so that it doesn't hit a ceiling. There's no such thing as a too-powerful working class. So we don't want to put ourselves on a road where the inevitable outcome will be a situation where we trade our power for some other kind of more immediate gain.

What can this organizing look like, if we decide to not make concessions that will limit our ability to use our strength as a class? How will we make bread-and-butter gains to improve our daily lives but hold true to the ideas articulated in the IWW's preamble?

* * *

I hear it a lot from union officers and staffers at labor conferences: "How many members does the IWW have?" I ask how many they think we have and the number is always many times the actual number. And when I ask why they think it's that many, the answer is almost always the same: "I see you guys everywhere." I'm so glad to be a part of a group where it's not a drag to go out and join a picket line or participate in a rally to beat back some politrickster's bad idea – where the attitude is that it's a pleasure to be in the company of working people fighting for what's right.

I think we can take this attitude even further, and build it into our organizing. We shouldn't let the concept of workplace organizing confine us too narrowly. There's an old saying that the IWW "organizes the worker, not the job," meaning that we aim to create a movement beyond claiming the right to represent some kind of legally-defined bargaining unit.

Part of the reason for the decline of unions is that they are too narrowly focused on the benefits for their own membership, and do not pay enough attention to issues affecting all workers, union members or not. It seems a stark injustice, considering that in the US and Canada, it isn't too easy to just up and join a union. When attention is given to issues beyond those addressed in contracts, it most often happens around elections, or around support for legislative efforts which more often that not fail.

I think we can make some modest but important efforts to connect issues that confront many workers with actions that can attract many more people than just the "usual suspects." A free health clinic that helps people gain access to screenings or medical help, and also creates a space to talk about how what kind of health care system working people need. A tax clinic to help workers claim every possible benefit, but also asks why so much of our money is being spent to enrich the already rich. A rally in support of public transit which stresses that we will not be the ones to bear the costs of cutbacks and bad service.

We can confront problems in our communities and take charge of organizing for change, instead of being passive service consumers. Even if the action we take now isn't a permanent fix, when we work together to confront problems we are building an attitude that any union effort will benefit from: our lives will get better from knowing one another, and together we can do things we couldn't do alone.

B.C. log-truck drivers strike

A strike by independent log-truck drivers has begun causing problems in the northern British Columbia forest industry. The 500 truckers set up pickets at sawmill weigh scales in Prince George, Vanderhoof and Mackenzie in February. They are fighting for higher hauling rates and the right to negotiate those rates directly with forest companies instead of through logging contractors.



The IWW: 1905 - 2005

An IWW cartoon from the April 10, 1910, Industrial Worker.

Blanket Stiffs, also known as Bundle Stiffs and Bindle Stiffs, were migrant workers that moved from job to job in the early 20th century carrying their belongings in bundles. The IWW organized heavily among these workers.

The Industrial Workers of the World collection at the Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs at Wayne State University has many IWW cartoons and other illustrations. Anyone interested in the collection, or interested in adding to it, should contact William LeFevre at the Archives at 313-577-2789 or by email at William.LeFevre@Wayne.Edu.

3-year strike continues

Members of United Steelworkers Local 2952 have been picketing a run-down Vancouver auto plating plant for 38 months, fighting Modern Auto's demand for major concessions and its refusal to address unsafe conditions. The company has racked up $34,810 in fines for subjecting scabs to unsafe working conditions since the strike began.

B.C. Workers Compensation Board inspectors have been denied access to the facility and the company has simply ignored orders to correct unsafe conditions.

Aussie unions threaten strike against U.S.-style labor law

Unions are planning strikes across Victoria June 30 to protest against changes to industrial relations law scheduled to take effect the next day. The Chamber of Commerce complains that the strike will not improve relations between employers and unions.

Meanwhile, federal workplace relations minister Kevin Andrews said in a speech that ideas of "fairness" in workplaces were "misconceived" and "an emphasis on fairness only leads to regulatory excess and inefficiency."

Detailing the Government's long-term agenda in workplace relations, Andrews said his vision of the workplace in five years time would have no place for unions, industrial awards or an independent umpire to settle workplace disputes. State officials vowed to fight the plan, which would eliminate their role in regulating working conditions.

NLRB rejects FedEx indy contractor scheme

After the National Labor Relations Board rejected FedEx's claim that drivers at its FedEx Ground division were independent contractors, the Board counted union representation ballots cast by 53 contract drivers at its Fairfield, N.J., facility. Drivers voted 34-10 against certifying Teamsters Local 177 as their collective bargaining representative; another nine ballots were challenged.

The election took place Dec. 3, but the ballots were impounded until Feb. 10 because of the dispute over whether the drivers were employees or independent contractors.

The Board ruled drivers who conduct pickups and deliveries at local customers, as well as "linehaul" drivers who move packages between FedEx Ground hubs and terminals, are employees because they form an essential part of the company's operations, their work schedules preclude conducting significant commercial activity, and there are limited entrepreneurial opportunities for them.

FedEx Ground drivers must wear full uniform while on duty, observe set delivery and pick-up times, cut their hair to suit managers' tastes, and hook their truck keys on the designated finger when walking to doors to deliver packages (the little finger of the nonwriting hand). FedEx says they are "independent" and that driving for its ground division is a way to "be your own boss" – perhaps because drivers must also lease their trucks from FedEx and pay for gas and other operating expenses. They are paid for their mileage, each stop they make, each package picked up, and a daily guarantee. Most work 60 hours a week. Unlike other FedEx workers, they do not receive overtime pay, health benefits, paid vacations or holidays.

The NLRB is not the only agency to question FedEx's claim that the drivers are independent contractors. Last July, FedEx Ground drivers who filed a class-action lawsuit against the company won a victory when a California state court ruled that they are employees because of FedEx's "close to absolute actual control" over drivers.

Montana and New Jersey state officials are investigating the contractor scheme, and the federal Internal Revenue Service is investigating FedEx's driver classification to determine whether FedEx has "pushed the envelope of control so far" that it's no longer in compliance with an earlier agreement under which its predecessor company was permitted to count drivers as independent contractors. If the IRS rules that the drivers are employees, FedEx would owe millions of dollars in payroll taxes.

FedEx has around 15,000 independent-contractor drivers and about 60,000 employee drivers, most of whom deliver packages shipped by air. The contract drivers help FedEx undercut UPS by avoiding paying overtime, health benefits, upkeep on its vehicles, and other expenses. But the company maintains nearly total control over the drivers, telling them when to make pick-ups and deliveries and even videotaping drivers working their routes to ensure that all policies are followed.

Minnesota printer wins $144,000 NLRB settlement

A worker has received $144,000 in lost wages and benefits and payment in lieu of receiving his job back, more than two years after being fired for union organizing at Banta Corp.'s Maple Grove, Minn., printing plant.

NLRB bars symphony strike

A settlement was reached in an eight-week-old strike as the NLRB was preparing to seek a federal injunction ordering St. Louis Symphony Orchestra musicians back to work. The strike began Jan. 3 when musicians voted 85-3 against the orchestra's proposed contract. The NLRB said the strike was illegal because the union's lawyer did not file legal notices with the federal mediators' office 30 days before the end of the contract.

Workers Memorial Day...

continued from page 1

are known for dangerous conditions and high rate of occupational accidents and diseases. Out of the daily toll of 300 asbestos victims, most are in the construction sector.

Nowhere are workers safe. In the United States, the Bush administration proposes deep cuts to health and safety budgets, and has overturned or blocked dozens of workplace safety rules, including the ergonomics standard (employers are no longer required even to report these injuries) and rules regulating several cancer-causing substances. New child labor rules allow 14-year-olds to operate dangerous equipment including deep fryers and compactors. Instead of enforcing existing regulations, the government is developing "partnerships" with employers and agreeing to give advance notice of any inspections.

In the UK, workplace fatalities are up, major injuries are up and over-three-day injuries are up. Asbestos cancers alone kill more people each year than road accidents. Meanwhile enforcement by the Health and Safety Executive has dropped off dramatically. HSE investigated nearly 28,000 incidents in 2003/04, but prosecuted employers in fewer than 1,000 cases. The average fine per offense was just £9,858. A total of 235 workers died at work; only 11 directors or managers were convicted of safety offences.

In 21st century Britain, and in much of the rest of the world, you can still lose your job for raising safety concerns, still lose your life for staying quiet. Workers' Memorial Day is the day workers worldwide say "enough!" We are not factory fodder. We deserve to leave work with our health intact.



Immigrants most likely to die

According to the U.S. Labor Department, of the 5,559 fatal work injuries in the U.S. in 2003, 14 percent were Hispanics or Latinos. While the overall number of those killed on the job is falling, deaths among Latinos are on the rise.

"Most of those deaths could have been prevented," said Carlos Eduardo Siqueira, who leads a project aimed at identifying workplace hazards affecting Brazilian immigrant workers in Massachusetts. The state's occupational health surveillance program reports that Hispanics have the highest rate of fatal injury among all workers.

"They are not freaky accidents," Siqueira notes. "In most cases, workers die because of unsafe working conditions, poor training or lack of proper equipment. In many cases, it was a matter of who was going to die, not what the worker did wrong."

How much a worker's life?

Twelve workers have been died in Indiana steel mills in the past five years, but the Indiana Occupation Safety and Health Administration has fined employers only $45,500 for the deaths.

"I was at a loss that a life could be worth so little," said Shirley Parker, whose husband Tony died June 4 at Ispat Inland Inc. OSHA cited the company for at least 86 violations since 2000. The agency found five serious violations in connection with Parker's death, and fined the company $8,625.

"Are the mills were supposed to be upset about that amount of money?" Parker asked. "I thought the job of OSHA was to put the fear of God into companies – like they were the hand of God. But they're not."

Elizabeth Richards, whose husband Karl, died Dec. 21 of carbon monoxide poisoning at U.S. Steel Corp.'s Gary Works, agrees.

"If I had my way they'd be fined $10 million, $20 million. ... OSHA isn't doing its job and the mills don't care," Richards said.

"My husband worked 24-hour work shifts, and they didn't care. (Karl) said he'd lose his job if he didn't work. ... He had no union behind him." (The United Steel Workers union says IOSHA is doing a good job protecting workers, despite the deaths.)

Stern-Hoffa group loses first round

BY HARRY KELBER, LABORTALK

For most of the three-day meeting of the AFL-CIO Executive Council on March 1-3 in Las Vegas, there were heated debates, mainly about money: who gets what share of the federation's income, what for and how much. A proposal by Teamster President James Hoffa to give international unions 50 percent of the per capita contributions they pay the national AFL-CIO, a rebate of $35 million, was rejected by a vote of 15 to 7.

Those voting for the rebate included members of the recently disbanded New Union Partnership: Andy Stern, president of the Service Employees; Bruce Raynor and John Wilhelm, co-heads of Unite Here, and Terence O'Sullivan, president of the Laborers. They were joined by Hoffa, UFCW President Joe Hanson, and United Auto Workers President Ron Gettelfinger.

Opposing the proposal were leaders of communication workers, steel workers, public employees, machinists, teachers, electricians and nine other unions. Instead, the Executive Committee approved a proposal by AFL-CIO President John Sweeney to increase funding for political and legislative activities to a total of $45 million a year.

Stern and Hoffa said their group represented 40 percent of the total AFL-CIO membership, and they would continue to fight for their proposal, right up to the federation's quadrennial convention in late July.

In demanding a 50 percent rebate of their per capita payments, the Stern-Hoffa faction offered no analysis of past organizing failures, nor did they indicate any new strategies that could improve labor's record. In the past two decades, AFL-CIO unions have been unable to organize any of the scores of companies with 15,000 employees or more.

There was almost no discussion about how the AFL-CIO would be able to operate if it had to return half of its annual income to the international union affiliates, except that activities that did not contribute to union organizing would be eliminated or shrunk.

One heartening feature of the meeting was the agreement that labor's top priority is to defeat President Bush's plan to privatize Social Security. Unions pledged to conduct massive mobilizations, using the same tactics that were so effective during the 2004 election. Popularizing the union message will be an important component in the drive to save Social Security. Winning this battle can give a major lift to union organizing efforts.

Decisions about the shape and future direction of the AFL-CIO may not be reached until late July, when the 800 or so elected convention delegates (meeting in Chicago) will have the last word. Meanwhile, there's backroom talk about who will be the next AFL-CIO president. Sweeney wants another four-year term, but there is hardly any enthusiasm for his re-election.

Is more cash the answer?

More money won't make a significant difference. For one thing, giant corporations can outspend unions, as was demonstrated in the lost strike and lockout at southern California's three supermarket chains.

Union leaders haven't figured out how to win large organizing campaigns, and until they do, there won't be any spectacular growth. They botched the California strawberry drive; their Las Vegas Building Construction Organizing Campaign, which was supposed to serve as a model for the industry, fell apart. The AFL-CIO has precious little to show for the tens of millions it spent on organizing over the last ten years.

The Teamsters spent three years trying to organize the 13,000 drivers and terminal employees at Overnite Transportation, and finally announced it was abandoning the strike. What will union president James Hoffa do differently at Overnite when he gets the additional millions from the AFL treasury?

The Organizing Institute training program must be improved. O.I. "graduates" are no match for the sophisticated anti-union consultants that major corporations hire. We need higher standards for organizers.

Second, each union should cultivate a corps of volunteer organizers who work in the same occupation and industry as the unorganized workers. Most non-union workers are suspicious of paid organizers, trying to "sell" them the union. They generally feel the same way about any organizer who has never worked at their job. But they may respond to organizers who have first-hand experience about their work and can answer their questions about the union.

Third, the AFL-CIO must do a far better job in reaching out to the many millions of workers who say they want a union. We'll never be able to organize them unless we can talk to them on a sustained basis. A weekly television or radio program could be helpful. So could more exposure by labor leaders on talk shows and press conferences.

The traditional way of recruiting workers into unions is not working; changes in strategy and tactics are needed.

Stop wasting workers' money on politicians

BY JONATHAN TASINI

Over the last 20 years, the labor movement has poured billions of our members' hard-earned dollars into electoral politics - and we've gotten very little to show for it except a weaker labor movement, too many election day whuppings and too many politicians who, when they do win, promptly turn their backs on working men and women. It's time we turned off the spigot and put the money to better use.

The Center for Responsive Politics reports that between 1979 and 2004, unions gave about $500 million in direct contributions to candidates for federal office. From 1998 to 2004, unions lavished about $600 million on political parties. And unions paid $100 million to 527s (independent political action committees) in 2004. That's $1.2 billion in cash - not counting money spent on the parties from 1980 to 1998 and labor's own effort to get its members out to vote. A few union political experts tell me unions spend seven to 10 times what they give candidates and parties on internal political mobilization. So we're talking $8 billion to as much as $12 billion on federal elections alone.

What have we gotten for that? For the last 25 years, employers have broken labor laws with impunity and fired tens of thousands of workers trying to organize. By every measure, life for most workers has become more difficult. Few politicians challenge the right of corporations to run the workplace like a dictatorship. We've lived almost entirely under Republican presidents - the exception being Bill Clinton's eight years. Even those years hurt us, as Clinton aggressively lobbied for the North American Free Trade Agreement and enthusiastically embraced its dubious premise - an unmitigated disaster for American and foreign workers.

Don't get me wrong. I admire the fire and dedication of the labor people who pour their souls into campaigns. But we've been acting on the belief that the political arena could make up for our declining numbers and weakness in the workplace. Our money and troops have squeezed out a few victories for Democrats. But we've remained passengers, not drivers of the political vehicle. Politicians ignore us because we can't turn out enough voters to end their careers. We couldn't even muster a meaningful spanking for those NAFTA-backing Democrats.

So my proposal is simple: During the coming two-year election cycle, labor should not write a single check to a federal candidate or a political party. Let's take the money - and, more important, our focus and energy - and pour it into organizing new workers, kicking the stuffing out of the Wal-Mart family, pushing a national campaign for health care for all and advancing the labor-environment-sponsored Apollo Alliance, an effort to create good-paying jobs through new sustainable-energy projects. Faced with the specter of a rapacious global economy, people are ready for someone who'll champion broader, enforceable rights at work.

I can hear the chorus now: We have to support our political "friends" and defeat the Republicans. Get real. Given that virtually every incumbent is reelected in Congress, there is no chance the Democrats will be in a position to retake either the House or Senate in the next cycle - nor will Democratic incumbents lose. And, if by some miracle the Democrats recapture Congress, the chances are less than zero that they would attain a filibuster-proof margin in the Senate. Serious labor law reform is a pipe dream for a long time to come - even if we could get full Democratic Party support, which is doubtful.

So, for two years, let's do something radical: find out which politicians fight for working people without needing to be slipped a check. If we have to start trying to buy votes again, there will be plenty of takers. On the other hand, abstinence might earn us something - like more members and more respect, which, in the end, is what we need to have real power to shape the political agenda.

Tasini is former president of the National Writers Union (UAW); this article is excerpted from the Feb. 20 Los Angeles Times.

AFL staffers face pink slips

The AFL-CIO is laying off up to a quarter of its staff, in order to free up funds for lower dues to affiliated unions. More than 80 staffers will lose their jobs. The AFL is cutting spending on organizing by nearly $15 million – while raising political and legislative spending from $32 million to $45 million a year.

Desperate workers face new attack...

Congress "reforms" bankruptcy laws

While the boss press likes to prattle about economic recovery and "consumer confidence," decades of stagnant wages and skyrocketing housing and medical costs have left many workers in desperate shape.

Already working hours that rival those common a century ago, few workers can take on another job (even if such a job could be found). With unions but a distant memory in most workplaces (only 7.9 percent of private sector workers still belong to unions, and they are heavily concentrated in larger workplaces), and union power weaker than it has been since the days of rapid-fire injunctions and private goon squads, there's little hope of getting much of a raise. And so growing numbers of workers are being forced to declare bankruptcy.

The number of people filing for bankruptcy has soared from under 300,000 in 1980 to 1.6 million a year today, outraging the credit card pushers and other loan sharks who have done their level best to push people under and want to make sure to extract every possible penny from their financial collapse.

But even a vulture can't feed off a stripped carcass, and so the bankers have had to turn to Congress to "reform" the bankruptcy laws so that they can keep sucking the blood from their victims even after they go bankrupt.

A recent Harvard University study found that most U.S. bankruptcies are caused by soaring medical bills, and by the strategies (such as borrowing money) workers employ to try to keep the medical bill collectors at bay. The other major causes are divorce and the loss of a job.

Typically, these workers have health insurance, but were still unable to afford the co-pays, deductibles and uncovered services that leave huge gaps in most people's coverage. Others were unable to work for a time because of illness, losing their insurance as a result or falling behind on other bills.

The banks and credit card companies don't want to hear it. The bottom line is simple: they're owed money (billions of dollars), and they want to be paid.

Bankruptcy is all very well for airlines and steel companies, which have abandoned their obligations to tens of thousands of retirees under cover of bankruptcy protection, and slashed workers' wages (tearing up union contracts in the process) to the point where many workers are being forced to contemplate their own trip to bankruptcy court. They, after all, are the deserving poor.

If a worker can't pay her bills, she does not go running to a judge for permission to cut her rent payments in half, to trim her health insurance payments by 20 percent, or to escape the student loans she racked up to get that near-minimum-wage job. At least she better not, or they'll be sending her off to the mental hospital for observation – and most insurance policies won't cover the cost.

No, even if we're forced into bankruptcy, the most we can hope for is to get rid of our "unsecured" debts (like credit cards and, ironically, medical bills; you can't escape student loans or reduce your mortgage payments, though you may well lose your home). And because the bankers and credit card companies have friends in Congress, in another six months all but the poorest workers won't be able to escape unsecured debts either. (If you have a court judgment against you for threatening the lives of workers at a clinic providing abortion services, however, you will be able to discharge that in bankruptcy. Aren't family values great?)

The reforms apply only to individuals; corporations will continue to be able to turn to the bankruptcy courts to escape their labor contracts, to evade liability for communities and workers they have poisoned, or to abandon their promises to retirees and other ne'erdowells.

There could hardly be a starker illustration of who runs the government, and in whose interests it is run. But the solution is not to elect more Democrats to Congress (several of them voted for the "reform" bill anyway), but rather to rid ourselves of this system which makes our very illness an occasion for profit and blood-sucking.

Boom goes the bust

Meanwhile, the economy keeps right on generating profits, and throwing workers on the scrap heap. Both the number of unemployed and the unemployment rate increased in February, according to the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The number of unemployed workers rose to 8 million, while the unemployment rate increased to 5.4 percent. The number of long-term unemployed – 27 weeks or longer – remained unchanged at 1.6 million, or one in five of every officially unemployed.

Millions more are working part-time jobs because they are unable to find regular work, or have given up on finding a job after months of pounding the pavement and so are not counted as jobless by the statisticians.

And with wages continuing to fall, even for those with college degrees, the number of workers holding more than one job increased by 432,000 to 7.7 million.

Both hourly wages and weekly earnings rose slightly but came in well below inflation, meaning that workers continue to lose ground.

Some people, of course, are doing quite well – and making the averages look quite a bit better than they otherwise would in the process. Millions of workers are doing skilled work that used to command premium rates for not much more than the minimum wage. Computer programmers continue to work 12-hour days, those who can find jobs – too tired to think of their colleagues who in some cases have been looking for work for years.

Always looking for a way to spin the numbers, the business press was quick to hail the jobs report as proof of an economic recovery, and we once again heard from pundits scared that the economy might overheat. No doubt, the Federal Reserve will boost interest rates again in order to make sure that inflation keeps ahead of our wages.

It's a crazy system. Some make millions by fiddling the books or destroying the lives of their fellow humans (lay-offs almost always boost the stock price). Others poison our rivers and skies, and become great philanthropists. Others prey on our weaknesses and foibles. It's all good business.

Just don't get your hands dirty doing something actually productive. There's too many folks doing too much of that already, and there's not much money in it.

Steelworkers, PACE to merge

The United Steel Workers and the Paper, Allied-Industrial, Chemical and Energy workers unions have agreed to merge. The new union will be known as the United Steel Workers. The new union will include the remnants of several CIO-affiliated industrial unions, including the Rubber, Oil, Paper and Steel workers unions (and the remains of the old AFL auto workers union, absorbed into the Paperworkers several years ago), and have some 850,000 members.

AFL orders Carpenters back

AFL-CIO President John Sweeney has told the Carpenters union that they must rejoin the Federation by July or be expelled from its Building Trades Department, potentially setting off bitter jurisdictional warfare with other construction craft unions.

The 530,000-member union withdrew from the AFL-CIO in March 2001, complaining that the Federation was top-heavy and not devoting enough resources to organizing. Since then, the Carpenters and AFL construction unions have been in an often uneasy truce, with the Carpenters and Laborers, in particular, nibbling at each other's traditional jurisdictions.



Chicago bike messengers wobble job

Arrow bike messengers shut off their radios for two hours March 10 to protest management's denial of pay raises. Arrow messengers have been in negotiations with management for the last few months, with several meetings between representatives for the bikers and management, including owner Phyllis Applebaum.

The bikers shut off their radios promptly at 2 p.m. and dropped off their remaining runs before gathering at 160 S. LaSalle Street, chosen because of the National Labor Relations Board offices on the fourth floor. Arrow responded by telling their clients that they could not take more orders for the day. Twenty of 21 on-demand bikers were involved in the action.

Arrow bikers make a fixed amount per package, in contrast to the percentage of client charges which most other companies pay. Typically, a one-hour run costs the customer between $8 and $12, with the messenger receiving $2.75. Arrow rates have not changed since 1998, although office personnel have received raises.

At the end of the radio silence at 4 p.m., all bikers called into base and received no work. They then rode together to the Arrow base where a meeting with management and biker representatives took place. Management agreed to reconsider the pay raise request and resume negotiations.

Many bikers from other firms witnessed the Arrow bikers standing by and voiced their support during the action.

The "American" sweatshop system

FROM WORKERS ONLINE, AUSTRALIA

A Bexley, New South Wales, sweatshop is paying women AUS $4 an hour to produce garments for glamour retailers in a foretaste of life under Prime Minister John Howard's "Americanised" industrial relations regime.

Union representatives raided a suburban bungalow under NSW rights the prime minister intends to strip away. Inside, they found seven seamstresses and an employer, Chung Sheng Tan, who claimed to know nothing of workers compensation or superannuation.

The fashion industry bottom-feeder undercut legitimate operators, requiring women to bid for the right to operate his machines.

"Whoever bids the lowest gets the work," TCFUA secretary Barry Tubner said.

"This is the American system in action and it will become the norm if John Howard takes over the state systems.

"No legitimate manufacturer can compete with this type of exploitation."

Goldbridge Clothing contends that Bexley seamstresses are "independent contractors," running private businesses in which they sew garments on a piece rate basis.

Breakaway San Francisco Local 87 returns to SEIU

FROM LABORNET.ORG

Several hundred San Francisco janitors voted Feb. 12 to accept a "Unity Agreement" brokered by some of the leaders of break away United Service Workers For Democracy Local 87 USWD and the SEIU International and its California janitors division SEIU Local 1877. The 263-123 vote brought thousands of San Francisco janitors back into the SEIU while restoring SEIU Local 87's charter and promising that no merger would take place without a majority vote of the members before the 2012 convention. Elections will be held by June to select leaders of the revived local.

The settlement was a major climb-down for Mike Garcia, president of SEIU 1877, and SEIU president Andy Stern. The two had merged local 87 into local 1877 without a vote of the members, leading to a revolt in which the members voted to disaffiliate and form a new independent union.

The SEIU has engineered dozens of forced mergers throughout the country, usually installing appointed trustees who never worked as the janitors or hospital workers they represent. Stern has argued that these mergers are necessary for the labor movement to fight multi-national employers.

Workers initially voted almost 2-to-1 for the independent union, which was never able to establish its own democratic structures in the workplace or to break free of the labor lawyer and former union officials who helped launch it. As a result, the new union was unable to build the workplace power necessary to defend workers against a recent wave of lay-offs and speed-ups – or to block the janitorial contractors' decision to require workers to pay in an additional $200 a month for health benefits.

Nuclear workers: Pay us before we die

Missouri workers employed by an Atomic Energy Commission contractor are asking the government to approve expedited benefits for thousands of workers suffering from cancers and other illnesses caused by the facility's careless handling of uranium from 1942 until 1968. Some 3,500 workers were exposed to large doses of radiation at Mallinckrodt facilities. (The company is now owned by Tyco Healthcare, which says it has received more than 1,000 requests for supporting documents from affected workers.)

If the proposal is approved, workers would receive a mere $150,000; if it is not they will have to wait through years of investigations to try to determine specific radiation exposure for each worker. Mallinckrodt and other contractors generally ignored the dangers of radiation, and so did not keep adequate records.

Academic Freedom?

BY DAVE LINDORFF, COMMON DREAMS

Amid all the controversy over the observations of University of Colorado professor and leftist Indian political activist Ward Churchill concerning the military justifiability of the 9-11 attacks on the World Trade Center, it's easy to overlook the fact that freedom of academic expression on American university campuses is already virtually dead.

Churchill is actually in an unusually strong position. With his tenure, the only way that the lynch mob out to fire him can get rid of him without facing a huge damage suit in court would be to prove a case of moral turpitude or dereliction of teaching duties or something equally heinous.

But for many teachers on American campuses tenure is a thing of the past. Increasingly, universities large and small, famous and unknown, are turning to contract hires to do the teaching. These virtual professors are only offered "folding chairs" that carry a contract – one year, two years, three years, or maybe five years. At that point, they have to be renewed. They cannot be considered for tenure. Many other teachers are simply adjuncts, hired on a year-to-year or semester-to-semester basis to teach one or two classes. They have no contract at all to protect them.

Clearly, a person who has no job security has no freedom of expression. Such faculty are no better off than the worker in a Wal-Mart or a General Electric factory – which means they have no more freedom of speech than a 12th century serf. They speak out at their own risk. Any adjunct or contract-hire teacher who spoke out politically the way Churchill did would be gone in a flash – if not the next day, then certainly at the end of the term.

At Temple University, a unionized urban institution in Philadelphia, for instance, increasing numbers of professors are working on a contract basis. At Alfred University, where I taught journalism for a year, tenure is a bad joke. Although awarded after a typically exacting process of peer review, it has to be renewed every five years – thus providing as much academic freedom protection as a felt body-armor vest.

There is no question that the lack of tenure makes for less outspokenness, iconoclasm and strength of conviction.

With the bloodhounds of the right in full McCarthy lynching mode these days, including organized groups of student yahoos who monitor their teachers' lectures backed by a phalanx of right-wing media ready to amplify any complaint about non-mainstream viewpoints expressed by teachers in or outside the classroom, the fight for academic freedom has become more than academic. Yet instead of working to strengthen this important and historic tradition not just of tenure but of the very culture of free expression on campus, administrators are caving in to political pressure and undermining both.

Ward Churchill is a fighter, and will go down slugging. Most academics, I'm afraid, will just shut up and become conventional thinkers.

Colorado governor wants dissident professor Ward Churchill fired

BY PETER S. MOORE

The Republican governor of Colorado wants the University of Colorado to fire one of its professors for being "pro-terrorist."

Gov. Bill Owens has demanded the removal of Professor Ward Churchill, who blames U.S. foreign policy for provoking the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in Washington D.C. and New York City.

"No one wants to infringe on Mr. Churchill's right to express himself," said Owens. "But we are not compelled to accept his pro-terrorist views at state taxpayer subsidy nor under the banner of the University of Colorado."

A 5,600-word essay by Churchill suggested that the Sept. 11 hijackers were "counterattacking" the United States for economic and military policies that had caused massive suffering and millions of deaths in the Middle East and throughout the world.

Churchill challenged the innocence of the "technocratic corps" killed in the World Trade Center, calling them "little Eichmanns" who implemented a U.S. economic and foreign policy he likened to the administration of Nazi death camps. Churchill is an expert on indigenous rights issues in North America whose books include *Indians R Us?*, *The COINTELPRO Papers* and *A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas 1492 to Present.*

In response to public and university pressure, the tenured professor resigned from his post as chair of the University of Colorado at Boulder ethnic studies department Jan. 29. His term as chair was due to end in June.

"I have never said that people 'should' engage in armed attacks on the United States, but that such attacks are a natural and unavoidable consequence of unlawful U.S. policy," said Churchill in a press release posted the same day. He added that his reference to technocrats as little Eichmanns obviously did not include "the children, janitors, food service workers, firemen and random passers-by killed"; like the U.S. war machine, he said, the hijackers view such deaths as "collateral damage."

Gov. Owens described Churchill's resignation as department chair "a good first step" but insisted he resign from the faculty. "Mr. Churchill's views are not simply anti-American," said Owens. "They are at odds with simple decency, and antagonistic to the beliefs and conduct of civilized people around the world. His views are far outside the mainstream of civil discourse and useful academic work."

That same day, University of Colorado Chancellor Phil DiStefano announced the university would investigate Churchill's writings and speeches to see if he "overstepped his bounds as a faculty member. ... [W]e must understand the serious nature of actions to terminate or suspend a professor on the basis of conduct that includes political speech," DiStefano added, urging both sides to put their trust in due process.

Whether Churchill will get a fair hearing is in question. DiStefano described Churchill's views on the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks as "the most offensive, the most appalling, political expression" and said he personally found them "to be repugnant and hurtful to everyone touched by that tragedy."

Gov. Owens' stance is being echoed by Colorado talk radio personality Bob Newman, a former soldier who has called for Churchill to be prosecuted for treason.

Churchill was to speak at Hamilton College in Syracuse, New York, on Feb. 3, but the administration cancelled the event due to more than 100 threats received. The department head who invited him was subsequently forced to step down. Churchill has also received death threats as a result of the controversy. Churchill said in an addendum to his essay, "Some People Push Back: On the Justice of Roosting Chickens," that he wrote it as a "stream-of-consciousness interpretative reaction." "I'll readily admit that I've been far less than thorough, and quite likely wrong about a number of things." In 1993, he published the essay as a book with AK Press.

"The bottom line of my argument is that the best and perhaps only way to prevent 9-11-style attacks on the U.S. is for American citizens to compel their government to comply with the rule of law. The lesson of Nuremberg is that this is not only our right, but our obligation," he said.



Police arrest 3 students for protesting military recruiters

Three undergraduate students at the City College of New York were arrested March 9 during a peaceful protest against military recruiters. Hadas Thier, Nick Bergreen and Justino Rodriguez, along with a dozen other protesters, attended a job fair and stood in front of a National Guard recruitment table chanting anti-war slogans.

Private security and campus police immediately surrounded the protesters, pushed them into an empty hallway outside of the job fair, closed the hall door and assaulted two protesters and arrested a third who was taking pictures. The two students who were assaulted are now being charged with felony assault, and the third with obstruction of a government administrator. With the military failing to meet recruiting quotas, they are increasingly sensitive to protests.

Colorado grocery workers settle

UFCW Local 7 grocery workers at Kroger-owned King Soopers in Denver, Colo., have ratified a contract drawn up by federal mediator Scot Beckenbaugh which contains deep concessions on health care and cuts wages for new hires. Local negotiators had recommended rejecting the deal.

As we go to press, workers are voting on a similar contract offer from Safeway workers, which Local 7 bargainers sent to a vote without a recommendation. A separate proposal from the Albertsons chain was rejected because it would have cut pay, sick leave and vacations for all workers and maintained lower pay at four Albertsons-owned stores in the Denver area.

UFCW officials intervened to sell the agreement, which the union's local negotiating committee opposed; the international union said the offer "ensures affordable health care for UFCW members and is in line with other agreements recently ratified in Seattle, northern California and Las Vegas."

Meanwhile, in Los Angeles many veteran grocery workers have quit – unable to make ends meet on enforced 20-hour-a-week schedules implemented to open up hours for new, cheaper hires.

L.A. teachers oust officers

Los Angeles teachers threw out most of their union leaders March 1, electing as president a special education teacher and a slate of newcomers who campaigned on a social justice-centered agenda. It was the first time in United Teachers Los Angeles' 35-year history that an incumbent president and his slate had been ousted.

"This is a really completely new look to UTLA," said A.J. Duffy, a special education teacher who won by more than 2,000 votes. "We're all activists.... we're all organizers. We go to work with the community."

The union has been negotiating for a new contract for 18 months, and many teachers wanted a more militant approach and leaders with fresh classroom experience.

The new officers say they will speak out against No Child Left Behind, which they see as a conservative plot to cut money to schools and to eradicate public education in favor of vouchers and private schools.

South Street Workers Union...

continued from page 1

more than minimum wage (and some not even that). Although the corridor – which includes a mix of chain stores and locally owned businesses ranging from small boutiques to large, multi-level stores – is one of Philadelphia's busiest shopping district, its wages are sometimes lower than those paid in other parts of the city. One owner monitors workers from her home with surveillance cameras. Another operates a 2,000-square-foot store with just one worker per shift.

What these businesses have in common is low wages, benefits that run the gamut from inadequate to non-existent, and high turnover as workers jump from one crappy job to another.

The union was formed to help change these conditions, and currently has members at eight stores along the corridor. It has helped workers at a national franchise outlet end management's practice of demanding unpaid clean-up time, and defended workers threatened with losing their jobs. Several members also traveled to Brooklyn to build relations with workers involved in a similar campaign among immigrant workers there.

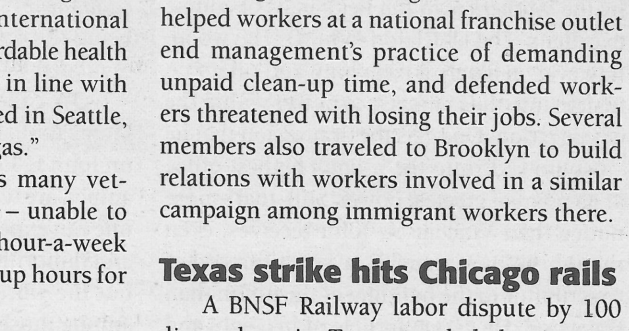
Texas strike hits Chicago rails

A BNSF Railway labor dispute by 100 dispatchers in Texas snarled the evening commute for more than 20,000 Chicago commuters during the March 2 rush hour.

The dispatchers, who guide trains and control switches along the railroad's tracks, walked off the job in Ft. Worth, Texas, around 4 p.m. – catching the railroad company by surprise and causing trains across the nation to halt. As a result, Chicago commuter trains could not pull out of Union Station or move along the tracks that transport people between Chicago and its suburbs.

The action lasted for two hours, although Chicago service was restored earlier. Commuter trains in Seattle were also affected, as were Midwest Amtrak lines.

Railway consolidation and automation means that many vital functions can no longer be performed by workers on the scene; creating potential safety hazards as workers rely on signals and systems, rather than first-hand knowledge, to dispatch trains, but also meaning that small groups of workers can have a dramatic impact.



Take Back Your Time Day conference

The 2nd annual North American Take Back Your Time conference will be held August 4-7, at Seattle (Wash.) University. The organizers hope to bring together labor, environmental, voluntary simplicity and religious activists with researchers and corporate officials to discuss strategies for confronting overscheduling, overwork and time poverty, and to build Take Back Your Time Day Oct. 24.

Early (discounted) registration ends April 1. Details are available at www.simpleliving.net/timeday/conference.asp

Retail bosses seek 16-hour days for U.S. truckers

Wal-Mart and other retailers are lobbying Congress to extend truckers' work day to 16 hours. Rep. John Boozman, whose district includes Wal-Mart's headquarters, is sponsoring a bill to allow a 16-hour work day as long as truckers take an unpaid, two-hour break. Boozman has received more than $48,000 in campaign contributions from Wal-Mart in the past two years.

Drivers currently are limited to working 14 hours, with 11 consecutive hours of driving allowed. That rule was struck down in federal court because it didn't take into account truck drivers' health, but Congress reinstated it for one year. Boozman's proposal would allow an additional two hours of non-driving work time (such as waiting for loads), call it a break, and allow employers to refuse to pay for it.

"This is a sweatshop-on-wheels amendment," said Joan Claybrook, president of safety advocacy group Public Citizen. "The last thing we need is for tired truckers to become even more fatigued and threaten the safety of those around them on the roads."

Meat packers stealing time

The Supreme Court has agreed to consider whether meat-processing plants must pay their slaughterhouse workers for the time it takes to change into protective clothing and walk to their work stations. An appeals court had ordered Tyson Fresh Meats (IBP) to pay $3.1 million to 815 workers in Pasco, Washington, for that time. However, in a Maine case another court ruled that 44 workers were not entitled to be paid for donning much lighter equipment.

The Tyson plant requires workers to gather their protective gear, don it in the plant's locker room and prepare their tools before entering the slaughter floor. However, workers are not considered clocked in until they show up, fully equipped, at the assembly line. They also aren't paid for the time spent changing out of the heavy gear for a 30-minute lunch break and at the end of the work day.

The cases are IBP v. Alvarez, 03-1238, and Tum v. Barber Foods Inc., 04-66.



Tell baseball: "No Sweatshops, Bucco!"

BY ALEXANDER ROSS

On March 5, the Pittsburgh Anti-Sweatshop Community Alliance (PASCA) staged an action at PNC Park, home stadium of the Pittsburgh Pirates, demanding that the Pirates take a stand for the rights of workers who sew Pirates' apparel.

Continuing the four-year-long "No Sweatshops, Bucco!" campaign, PASCA activists attended a press conference hosted by Pirates General Manager Dave Littlefield as part of the team's annual "Open House."

Activists seized the opportunity to publicly ask Littlefield about working conditions in the factories where Pirates' licensed apparel is produced. Littlefield refused to give any answers, claiming that decisions about apparel licensing were up to Major League Baseball Properties' senior vice president for licensing, Howard Smith. Littlefield claimed that the most he could do was "bring these concerns up" to Smith and MLB Properties.

Despite Littlefield's and Pirates management's attempts to pass responsibility to Major League Baseball, PASCA activists are keeping up the pressure. PASCA has planned several meetings in the coming weeks with Pirates' management, the Pittsburgh mayor's office, and the Pittsburgh Sports and Exhibition Authority, to hold the city and the team responsible for the rights of workers who sew licensed apparel.

Mexico: Independent unions gain ground

BY DAN LA BOTZ, MEXICAN LABOR NEWS & ANALYSIS

Despite a weak economy and the conservative political assault, Mexico's independent labor unions stood their ground and made some steps forward in 2004. The National Union of Workers (UNT) and the Mexican Union Front represent an important break from the government-controlled unions.

Within the independent labor movement, the Authentic Labor Front (FAT) continues to play an important role. During the past year, FAT continued to organize workers in a variety of industries including janitors, teachers, insurance company staff, and transportation workers. The FAT works on the U.S.-Mexico border and in northern Mexico through its workers' education and organizing centers, which have expanded from Ciudad Juárez to include Monterrey and Ciudad Chihuahua.

As part of the UNT, the FAT also influences the broader independent labor movement, putting forward its values of union democracy, militancy and internationalism. FAT's leadership and staff, and the activists and intellectuals who work with the organization, play an important role in developing critical analyses of neo-liberal globalization, the Fox administration's policies, and the role of business and the official unions.

While the labor movement has been reorganizing itself, it has had to do so within what remains a controlling and corrupt system. Since Vincente Fox took power in 2000, the degree of government control, corruption and violation of workers rights has not improved, and many would argue it has worsened in some areas. The Mexican labor boards (juntas) remain cesspools of corruption, gangsterism and political cronyism where union and workers' rights are routinely violated, sometimes in the most brutal way.

We should note in passing that the NAFTA side agreements, officially the North American Agreement for Labor Cooperation, have failed utterly to defend workers rights. The NAALC has failed to resolve any cases that would protect workers' rights in Mexico, and it has proven useless in defending workers or their health and safety.

(excerpted from a much longer report)

Mexican teachers...

continued from page 1

become close to this struggle. Peter explains that revoking a union's registration would make operating the organization a criminal offense. Says Peter, "An analogous situation in the United States would be if there was a Supreme Court ruling that any boss could pick up the phone, call a governor's office and say 'Can you please get rid of our union?'"

"Gaining any rights would be made extremely difficult because an employer could say 'We're not dealing with you. You're an illegal organization.' And the government would back them up," says union activist Betty Galvez. "Of course teachers' efforts to fight would continue, but it is the hopelessness that would destroy the organizing efforts, not the actual withdrawal of recognition."

Close to the FAT, Betty Galvez taught in Mexican schools for over 30 years as a member of both el SNTE ("the most charro union," says Banda) and as a member of the most militant education worker groupings, Oaxaca's Section 22 and the national democratic tendency, la CNTE. Through her experiences, Galvez concludes, "Hopelessness is the worst pollution there is."

Mexico's independent unions are watching what comes next. If SITESABES is declared illegal, says Cervantes-Gautschi, "the potential impact is tremendous."

Interview translation by Emily Weisbard of En Lace

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Review: Historical Encyclopedia of American Labor

BY J. D. CRUTCHFIELD

Robert E. Weir and James P. Hanlan, editors, *Historical Encyclopedia of American Labor,* two volumes. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004. $175 (hardcover).

There has long been a need for a concise, general reference work on the history of the American working class, suitable for the use of workers and students. To fill this need, Robert E. Weir and James P. Hanlan have produced the *Historical Encyclopedia of American Labor,* which is intended for high school students and public libraries. Although its hefty price tag will put it out of reach for most individual workers, libraries and union halls will find it a worthwhile addition to their collections.

The work, in two slender volumes totalling 733 pages, is a good deal shorter than an "encyclopedia" ought to be, which forces the editors to be highly selective in their choice of articles. As Gerald Friedman pointed out in his review for EH.net (Nov. 2004), there is a clear preference for persons and organizations on the left of the labor movement. On the other hand, the editors have made an effort to mention management policies and personalities that deeply affected the history of workers in America, including "Fordism," "Taylorism," the "National Civic Alliance," "Samuel Gompers," and several others.

The editors are also to be commended for their efforts to include recent events, such as maquiladoras and the P-9 strike, in a work largely devoted to the turn of the Twentieth Century and the Great Depression.

The Industrial Workers of the World have benefitted from the editors' selective bias, in that the frequent references to the One Big Union are probably disproportionate to the organization's practical importance for the American working class. Even so, reading through the *Encyclopedia,* one is forced to confront the fact that the IWW, influential as it has been, enjoyed a very brief heyday (or, let us say, *first* heyday), and never had more than 100,000 members at any time (not including members outside the United States, organized into autonomous administrations).

Unfortunately, the encyclopedia's treatment of the IWW is often sloppy and dissatisfying. The main article on the IWW, written by the *Worker's* own Jon Bekken, is of course excellent. The article on Wm. D. Haywood, however, is barely a page long and offers no insight into the man's rise to power within the organization. One gets the impression that he "just growed" into the union's highest office at its point of greatest power. Still, that's more notice than Vincent St. John receives, even though he was arguably a more important contributor to the building of the union than Haywood. He gets no article of his own, and is mentioned only once. Many of the union's greatest organizers – Joe Ettor, Jim Thompson, Frank Little, etc. – receive only passing notice of their arrests or deaths. By contrast, Joe Hill, whose practical contribution to the organization – other than as a symbol – was minuscule, gets three full pages.

There are a number of errors concerning the IWW, mostly small but still annoying. The article on Anarcho-Syndicalism, for instance, commits the common error of calling the IWW an anarcho-syndicalist "movement." It then gives the union seven Industrial Departments, rather than the 13 it started with or the six it now has, and claims that each department "(or 'syndicate')" is divided into "specific crafts and tasks" rather than into Industrial Unions. Wesley Everest is referred to as "Wesley Everett" (a mistake some IWW writers also made), and McKee's Rocks, Pennsylvania, is consistently reduced to a single rock. Perhaps most surprising, the article on Sacco and Vanzetti asserts that, "Organized labor had little connection to Sacco and Vanzetti," despite the IWW's long and intensive effort (including a general strike that closed mines across Colorado) to win their release.

Coverage of the philosophical, political and social movements that have shaped the labor movement is somewhat patchy. The articles on Anarchism, Anarcho-Syndicalism and Communism and Unions provide good introductions to these movements and their reception by workers and bosses. On the other hand, there is no entry on fascism, which, under various guises, has exercised considerable influence on the American working class, from within and without.

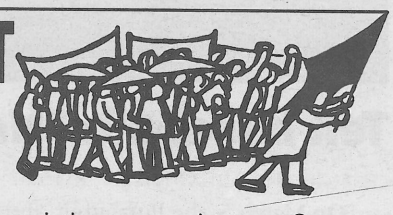
Articles on theoretical matters, such as Labor Theory of Value and Industrial Unionism are shallow at best. The former article is completely useless, and betrays a surprising lack of understanding of the theory and its history. The tepid article on Capitalism accepts implicitly the permanency of the capitalist system, the only question for labor being the degree to which capital should be regulated by government.

On other subjects, the encyclopedia seems to do better. The biographical articles on John L. Lewis and Walter Reuther, for example, are well-balanced, and as thorough as one can expect in a work of this size. Women and minorities are well represented throughout the work, though the diversity of views among those groups is sometimes neglected. Labor legislation and landmark court cases also receive generally good coverage.

The encyclopedia concludes with an interesting appendix of documents related to labor history. Although it includes neither the IWW Preamble nor the Industrial Union Manifesto, the appendix does offer two immortal Wobbly songs ("Solidarity Forever" and "There Is Power in a Union"), as well as statements and articles by IWW members. The excerpts are often frustratingly brief, but the appendix does give both workers and bosses a chance to speak for themselves. Unfortunately, it is organized alphabetically by titles that are often assigned by the editors, so that, for example, documents on racial discrimination in labor unions are to be found under "E", for "Excluding Black Workers," right after "Eugene V. Debs."

Despite a number of minor shortcomings, the *Historical Encyclopedia of American Labor* provides a useful introduction to many important topics, and is a good starting point for deeper research. Wobblies with union halls may want to order it for their reading rooms, and the rest of us can always ask the local library to order a copy.

MARCH TO THE LEFT



BY DORICE MCDANIELS

Beginning with this issue we will alternate columns by Gary Cox and Dorice McDaniels.

Hats off to the librarians. The American Library Association rose up in arms. One provision of the Patriot Act seriously infringed upon readers' right to privacy. Thousands of librarians rose up in genteel bibliophilic style with petitions, letters, phone calls, and e-mail. The offensive provision was amended. But hold off the celebration. Another sneaky deal substantially reinstated the objectionable features.

Do we fancy we can turn things around with petitions? Hardly. But every signature represents a kernel of dissent. So one fine day, I rearranged my features in a friendly smile and posted myself at a neighborhood market, an anti-Patriot Act petition in hand. Food 4 Less has long been the stamping ground of folks with initiative petitions and leaflets. (California law does not allow stores to bar petitioners from their entrances.) I filled up my sheet without incident.

Suddenly, a few days later, a sign appeared at the market entrance: "Say No To Solicitors." Please note that the term solicitor has a broader semantic and legal interpretation than the fellow knocking on your door trying to sell you something. A solicitor is also an individual who approaches someone with a view to request, persuade or appeal to another for any purpose. "Say No To Solicitors." Had a lawyer advised management to sidestep complications with those pesky civil libertarians? Just create a chilling atmosphere to discourage signatures. For a solid year this sign remained, its forbidding round face a constant warning.

Then one afternoon I spotted a man soliciting signatures for a state initiative. Nope. He hadn't noticed the sign. "But that hasn't anything to do with *me*. I'm true-blue legal."

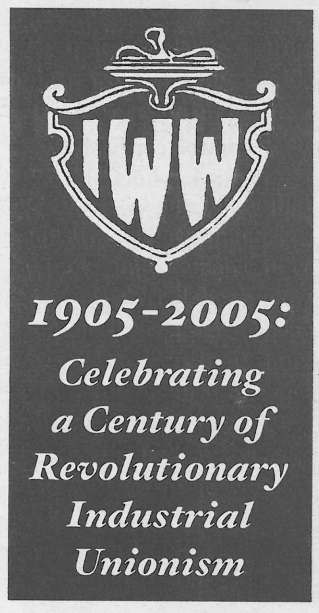
"Right on. I'm glad to see you exercising your civil rights. But you should be aware that the Patriot Act can sometimes turn legitimate solicitations on their heads. I never sign anything without reading it. I'll be back later with my magnifier."

"O.K. Shucks, nothing will happen to me. I'll stick around for several weeks."

But when I returned two days later the man was gone forever. Homeland security must be working overtime! ... Also gone was the sign. This was a quirky lesson in civil liberties.

But wait, had our petitioner – so self-assured of his rights – been frightened off after all? A few months later another petitioner with a quite different initiative was garnering signatures. And for this one it was clear sailing.

The lesson for us, as if we needed a lesson, is that civil liberties are still sanctioned for "true-blue" citizens. They are not intended for real libertarians.



Denver/Boulder, Colorado: Labor singers Charlie King and Karen Brandow will celebrate a century of IWW workers' culture April 1 (7:30 p.m.) at First Congregational Church, Broadway and Pine in Boulder. They will present workshops April 1 at noon at the CU campus (180 Benson ES), and April 2 at 2 p.m. in Denver (915 East 9th), and will also perform an evening concert at the Swallow Hill Center April 2.

IWW singer Utah Phillips will appear in concert and workshops April 21 and 22. On April 30 there will be a Labor Day eve concert with local performers at the Swallow Hill folk music center, Yale and Broadway, Denver, and the unveiling of a new book about the IWW Columbine strike and massacre in 1927 near Lafayette, CO. For details, contact iww_colorado@yahoogroups.com.

Madison, Wisc.: The History and Philosophy of the IWW in Song, April 20 at the Center for Creative & Cultural Arts (306 W Dayton, 7 p.m.). On April 30, the same venue hosts a Celebration of IWW Culture with music, poetry, theater and art. Saturday, May 7: Concert with Anne Feeney and Dave Rovics, UW Memorial Union. May 14: Panel discussion on Wisconsin IWW history at 7 p.m. at UW Memorial Union. For information, call 608-255-1800.

Milwaukee, Wisc.: May Day week concert with Anne Feeney and Dave Rovics. Friday, May 6, 7 p.m., Puddler's Hall, 2461 S. St. Clair. For information, 608-262-9036.

New Brunswick, NJ: Conference on the IWW, sponsored by the New Jersey May Day Committee in cooperation with Spirit of the Arts Foundation and Botto House/American Labor Museum. May 6-7, Robeson Center, Rutgers University.

Winnipeg, Manitoba: Friday, May 6, 7 p.m., Mondragon Cafe & Bookstore, 91 Albert St. An evening program featuring a short presentation on the history (and future) of the IWW in Manitoba; IWW tunes performed by the 1919 Insurrectionary Orchestra; and a display of historical materials/photos. This event will coincide with our Mayworks: Festival of Labour and the Arts 2005. For more information e-mail winnipegiww@hotmail.com.

Albany, NY: James Connolly celebration, May 14. This event will focus on James Connolly's life and contribution to the IWW and the international labor movement. Contact Timmy Walsh for more information: 215-222-1905; wbasg@yahoo.com.

Registration for the IWW Centenary conference in Chicago June 24-26 has started; people can access the registration form on the Centenary web page (which also has a calendar of events throughout the year) at http://www.iww.org/projects/centenary/events.shtml

In search of the humane workplace

REVIEW BY JON BEKKEN

Andrew Ross, *No-Collar: The Humane Workplace and Its Hidden Costs*. Temple University Press 2003 (2004 paper), 298 pp,

No Collar is a study of the new economy just before the crash, based largely on the author's immersion in web design/consultant firm Razorfish, with a briefer look at a hip hop/political start-up bought out by media giant Viacom. Much like an anthropologist, Ross hung out in the Razorfish offices, trying to understand the patterns of work and exploitation – and the real satisfaction many workers derived from their work before it was transformed by corporate reorganization – from the inside.

Many heralded the new economy as a sphere where the alienation of labor had been overcome – a humane workplace where work was meaningful and even pleasurable.

Employers in the new tech sector encouraged such fantasies. Razorfish, for example, hosted digital art and sponsored the feminist magazine *Bust*. Artists were embraced, both because companies in these emerging fields needed highly creative workers and because artists were accustomed to putting in long hours for little economic reward. Workers submerged themselves into their jobs, working prodigious overtime and driving themselves into the ground in part in pursuit of the lure of stock options, but primarily because they were so engaged in the work.

Even as employers shifted to part-time and freelance work, dropped health benefits, and created jobs which structurally required workers to put in 12-hour days (in a sector characterized by high unemployment even at the height of the boom), workers were invited to take control of their work on a micro level and encouraged to embrace flexibility.

It was not simply a matter of coercion. Many workers were so invested in this "no-collar work" that they voluntarily threw their entire lives into their jobs – erasing the boundary between work and leisure and buying into a careerism which saw work as an investment rather than as something for which one was entitled to be paid today. (Of course, most tech workers never enjoyed these psychic perks. As Ross notes, this new economy rested on a vast underbelly of low-wage jobs, toxic workplaces, indentured labor and environmental devastation.)

We have been torn between visions of reducing toil and transforming work to make it fulfilling, Ross argues. But "gratification is no guarantee of justice, least of all in an economy that feeds on uncertainty..." (258) A truly humane workplace can not exist within the constraints of capitalist domination and true equality, he concludes, and unions need to develop new strategies that speak to this mobile, contingent workforce.

BOOKS FOR REBELLIOUS WORKERS



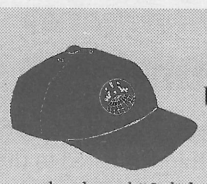
Wobblies! A Graphic History Edited by Paul Buhle and Nicole Schulman

The stories of the hard-rock miners' shooting wars, young Elizabeth Gurly Flynn (the "Rebel Girl" of contemporary sheet music), the first -sit-down strikes and Free Speech fights, the Pageant for Paterson orchestrated in Madison Square Garden, bohemian radicals John Reed and Louise Bryant, field-hand revolts and lumber workers' strikes, wartime witch hunts, government prosecutions and mob lynching, Mexican-American uprisings in Baja, and Mexican peasant revolts led by Wobblies, hilarious and sentimental songs created and later revived—all are here, and much, much more.

The IWW, which has been organizing workers since 1905, is often cited yet elusive to scholars because of its eclectic and controversial cultural and social character. *Wobblies!* presents the IWW whole, scripted and drawn by old-time and younger Wobbly and IWW-inspired artists.

"Tell the bosses to go to hell and buy an extra copy of this wonderful history. Give it to an exploited friend or just leave it in a public place. On the centenary of the IWW, we should be replanting the seeds of rebellion."

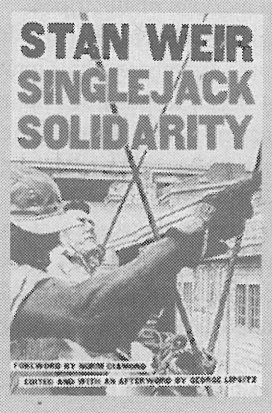
—Mike Davis, author of City of Quartz and Planet of Slums ***306 pages, $25.00***



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Solidarity Unionism: Rebuilding the Labor Movement from Below by Staughton Lynd

Staughton Lynd discusses how small groups of workers have created new forms of democratic organization, and argues that building a revolutionary labor movement today means nurturing such experiments in the face of corporate power. A modest, but deeply optimistic, search for possibilities. 63 pages, **$12.00**



Singlejack Solidarity by Stan Weir **Edited and with an afterword by George Lipsitz Foreword by Norm Diamond**

Written throughout Weir's decades as a blue-collar worker and labor educator, *Singlejack Solidarity* offers a rare look at modern life and social relations as seen from the factory, dockside, and the shop floor. This volume analyzes issues central to working-class life today, such as the human costs of automation, union policies, mass media images of work, and intergenerational relations in working-class families. It also provides humorous commentaries, historical vignettes, and moving portraits of people Weir encountered, including James Baldwin and C. L. R. James. Gathered here for the first time, Weir's writings are equal parts memoir, labor history, and polemic; taken together, they document a crucial chapter in the life story of working-class America. ***384 pages, $20.00***

Punching Out & Other Writings by Martin Glaberman, edited & introduced by Staughton Lynd

A collection of writings by autoworker, historian and poet Marty Glaberman. This collection reprints Glaberman's classic writings on the union movement, Marxism, the challenges facing radical movements in the 1970s and 1980s, the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, and a selection of labor poetry. Among the gems to be found are Egghead comics, an appreciation of C.L.R. James, and of course a reprint of the classic pamphlet on business unionism, Punching Out. Glaberman celebrated the possibilities of informal work groups both to resist capitalism and to run industry once we've dumped the bosses off our backs. 231 pages, ***$14.00***

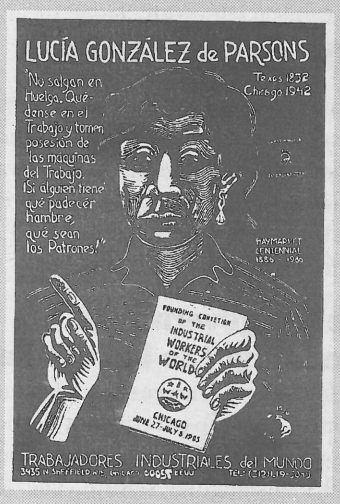
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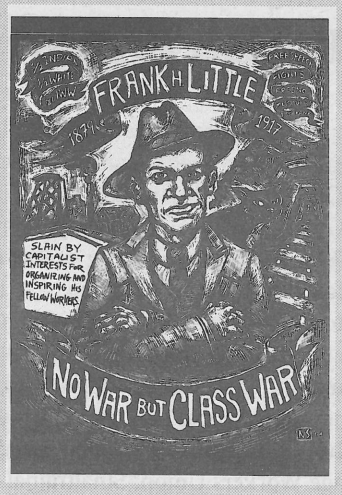
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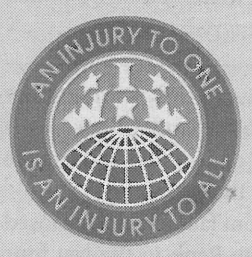


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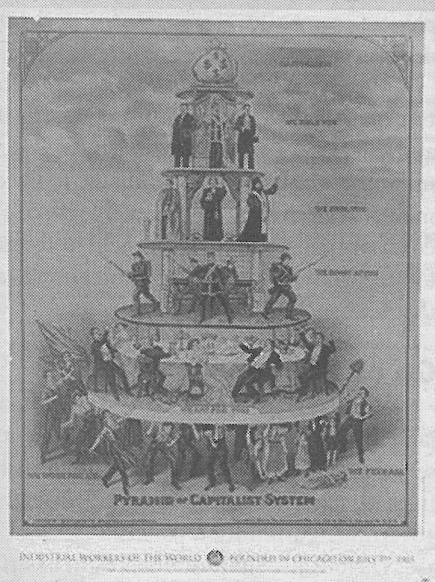
Frank Little by Nicole Schulman printed in dark red ink $7.50



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Wal-Mart's reign of terror

On Feb. 24, the Quebec labor relations board found that Wal-Mart Canada intimidated three female workers to hinder union organization at its store in Sainte-Foy.

And a federal appeals court has upheld a National Labor Relations Board ruling that Wal-Mart violated U.S. labor law four years ago when it disciplined an employee for entering an Oklahoma store wearing a pro-union T-shirt and for inviting co-workers to a union meeting. However, the court ruled that Wal-Mart could punish him for telling a co-worker he would like her to consider signing a union authorization card after work.

The UFCW has asked the Ontario Labour Relations Board to consider a second vote at a Windsor store following charges that Wal-Mart conducted a campaign of intimidation leading to an unsuccessful certification vote. The UFCW also lost an election at a Wal-Mart tire and lube shop in Loveland, Colorado, with just one worker voting in favor of union representation. The United Food and Commercial Workers had filed for the Loveland election with a one-worker majority on union authorization cards – a slender margin most union organizers consider too small to survive an anti-union campaign.

However, auto repair shop employees at the Wal-Mart store in St-Hyacinthe, Quebec, have been granted union certification by the province's labour relations board. They join some 200 workers in the main store who were certified Jan. 18. The store is one of only two unionized Wal-Marts in North America – management announced plans to close the other, in Saguenay, Quebec, this Spring rather than negotiate a contract with the UFCW.

And the U.S. Labor Department recently fined Wal-Mart, a company with $285 billion in annual sales, a paltry $135,540 – less than $6,000 for each of 85 violations – for breaking child labor laws by having teenage workers do hazardous jobs such as operating chain saws, fork lifts and balers. What's more, the department promised that its inspectors would give the company 15 days' advance notice of future investigations of violations of child labor, wage and hour laws. Wal-Mart evidently needs the warning, as it has been caught in several violations in recent years.

Meanwhile, Wal-Mart continues to rely on public subsidies to keep its labor costs low. In Connecticut, 1,028 of the company's 9,082 employees are enrolled in a state program that provides basic health coverage to low-income workers who otherwise would lack health care, costing the state $5.4 million a year. While Wal-Mart provides minimal health coverage, full-time workers must wait six months before becoming eligible for the plan; part-time workers must wait two years.

However, profits have not suffered from these violations. Wal-Mart has announced the company's annual dividend will be raised to 60 cents a share, returning more than $2.5 billion to stockholders this fiscal year.

Waitresses must weigh in

Atlantic City's Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa recently began weighing 210 cocktail waitresses, already required to wear cleavage-baring outfits, and bartenders and fire those who gain more than 7 percent. Unite Here Local 54 grieved the policy as a unilateral change in working conditions, and has said it will take the question to arbitration.

The casino claims the cocktail servers and bartenders are performers whose personal appearance and grooming are a key part of Borgata's image, and so it has the right to control their appearance and weight.

A lawsuit has also been filed. Two years ago, United Airlines paid $36 million to female flight attendants who sued over a policy that required them to weigh less then male counterparts of the same height and age.

A judge ruled that the weight requirement would be legal only if trim physiques were a "bona fide occupational qualification."

Iraq oil workers union gains ground

BY JOHN KALWAIC

Since the beginning of the US occupation, a new Independent Labor union has appeared in Iraq: the Southern Oil Company Union, founded just 11 days after the fall of Baghdad. This union represents many of the workers in the southern oil fields of Iraq now controlled by Dick Cheney's Halliburton. The SOCU has over 30,000 members, most of whom work in the oil and gas industries in the city of Basra, in British-occupied southern Iraq.

The Southern Oil Company Union is opposed to everything from low wages to privatization, and to the occupation itself, and is the only truly independent union in Iraq. All other unions are either attached to political parties or the collaborationist government. Abdullah Masen, a UK representative of the Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions, claims that the SOCU used to be part of their union and split off. However, the SOCU firmly denies this, and questions IFTU's legitimacy in representing the working people of Iraq.

There are three union centers in Iraq. The first is the IFTU, whose executive includes five delegates from the Iraqi Communist Party, five from Prime Minister Alawi's Iraqi National Accord, and five from the Arab Socialist Movement, all of which have collaborated with the U.S.-installed régime.

The second, in southern Iraq, claims to be "independent," but in reality is controlled by Shi'a religious parties, some of which are also collaborators. This union has representatives from the pro-Iranian Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq and the radical Shi'a cleric Al-Sadr's Dawa party. The third labor union is the Federation of Workers Councils and Unions of Iraq, affiliated to the Worker-Communist Party of Iraq.

The only union the U.S. and its appointed Iraqi government recognizes is the IFTU. The UN labor body, the International Labour Organization, recognizes both the IFTU and the FWCUI. The SOCU is not recognized by any governing body, and so has had to rely upon direct action and strikes to win gains. They do not seem to have any political or religious agenda and oppose the occupation. At the same time they oppose the armed "resistance," providing them with a broad base appeal to Iraqi workers of all stripes.

When the U.S. and its allies began to push out the Saddam régime, members of this new independent union began to push out their Bathist factory managers. Later, many of the ex-Bathist managers were brought back by the U.S.-appointed "Neo-Bathist" government. The SOCU has also been instrumental in preventing the Halliburton subsidiary KBR from using two companies, the Kuwaiti Al Khourafi and the Indian Meer, from bringing in Indian and Pakistani guest workers who were not allowed to organize to replace the jobs of Iraqi workers.

Due to the struggle of this union the Iraqi Ministry of Finance has cancelled the two lowest grades of the eleven wage scales. Now workers have a wage that is adjusted to the cost of living and paying rent in Iraq. Independent unions in Iraq are a prospect that strikes a blow both at the U.S. plans for "market reform" in the Middle East and the occupation of Iraq.

French general strike defends shorter hours

Tens of thousands of workers throughout France joined a national strike March 10 to oppose plans by the government of Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin to extend working hours beyond the current 35-hour week and to undermine social welfare benefits, including health care and pension rights.

The strike disrupted transport and services in 55 towns and cities nationwide. Nearly one million people participated in demonstrations across France – 150,000 in Paris and 800,000 elsewhere.

The action was the latest in a series of protests. On February 5, some 500,000 people demonstrated, and workers and students held industrial actions and protests in early March in the run-up to the general strike.



On March 8, nearly 200,000 students held nationwide demonstrations to protest curriculum reforms at universities and secondary schools. Paris police used tear gas against students to disperse the protest.

The National Assembly has approved legislation allowing private-sector employers to make workers put in more than 35 hours, ostensibly on a voluntary basis.

Filipino army invades strike-bound Luisita sugar mill

Heavily-armed soldiers have taken up combat positions in most of the 10 barangays encompassed by the sprawling Luisita sugarcane plantation in Luzon, Philippines.

The army claims it is responding to "intelligence reports" that guerillas of the communist-led New People's Army were sighted in "some" of the villages inside Hacienda Luisita. Soldiers earlier attempted to dismantle picket lines at the complex, shooting and killing several workers and children in the process. A city councilor and a priest who supported the strike have been assassinated by unidentified gunmen in recent weeks.

Cambodian police attack workers seeking severance

Cambodian riot police fired assault rifles and used electric batons to break up a protest by 1,300 workers demanding severance pay (their right under Cambodian law) from Sam Han, a garment factory that closed in February.

According to a union leader with the Coalition of Cambodian Apparel Workers Democratic Union, workers struck Feb. 12 to demand unpaid wages and severance pay. Sam Han answered by declaring bankruptcy Feb. 14. In an unprecedented attempt to ease tension in an industry that employs some 240,000 workers, the government agreed to pay wages for January and early February, but workers continued to demand full severance pay. They have been confronted with police violence throughout their strike.

At least 20 garment factories have closed in and around Phnom Penh in the last four months. Cambodian officials remain optimistic that last year's entry into the World Trade Organisation will lead to a long-term increase in exports. Meanwhile, the government has pursued an increasingly repressive policy against workers, including the murders of two independent unionists, Chea Vinchea and Ros Savannareth, in 2004 and numerous worker injuries at the hands of police mobs.

UK govt workers to strike

British government workers have voted by a massive majority to strike March 23 against plans to raise the pension age from 60 to 65. Currently public workers can retire with full pensions after 40 years on the job.

Egyptian textile strike

Some 400 workers at the 'Awadem branch of Esco's Qalyoub mill have been occupying their factory since Feb. 13 to protest the government's privatization of the factory.

"Our strike is against privatization and the government's market policies," says Mohamed Awad Mahran, who has been with the company for 23 years. Strikes are illegal in Egypt without approval from the government-controlled union.

World Labor Solidarity

A COLUMN BY THE INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY COMMISSION

Union-busting in Sweden

The IWW International Solidarity Committee has issued a statement expressing its full support for the SAC (Swedish Workers Central Organisation) local, Strangnas LS, in its conflict with the company XPonCard.

The SAC had reached a settlement in the labour court in October 2004, in which XPon admitted illegally transferring a SAC member and acknowledged SAC's right to organize (something they had been interfering with).

But since then, XPon has refused to implement the settlement, assigning SAC member Anders Nilsson to sit idly in an empty office isolated from other workers. The company claims there simply isn't enough work for him, at the same time that they are bringing in casual workers and hiring through temporary agencies. In March they laid off Anders and several other workers without regard to seniority rights, in a clear attempt to intimidate other workers.

Swedish metro workers strike

The Stockholm Metro & Tramway workers' section of the SAC began a two-day strike March 17 to protest operating company Connex's decision to repudiate existing agreements covering retirement age and working conditions, and to replace full-time workers with staff on part-time and temporary shifts. The strike was joined by subway and tram station and train workers throughout the Stockholm area.

Connex is attempting to increase the retirement age from 63 to 65, unilaterally tearing up earlier agreements and disregarding the fact that the workplace is one of the most stressful and dangerous in Sweden.

Connex is requiring many workers to put in 10-hour days and attempting to impose duty schedules that workers fought for, even as it replaces full-time workers with "part-time" and temporary staff many of whom are obliged to work full-time hours but denied secure employment or steady shifts.

94 unionists assassinated in Colombia in 2004

Preliminary figures record a total of 94 unionists assassinated in Colombia last year – slightly more than the body count of 90 unionists in 2003. The National Trade Union School also reports an increase in forced 'disappearances' and arbitrary detentions of unionists. This contrasts with the Colombian government's claims that anti-union human rights abuses are declining.

Zanon under attack

The workers of the self-managed Zanon ceramics factory are once again under attack by the government and business interests trying to evict them in the southern province of Neuquen, Argentina. Since 2001, employees have successfully managed the factory, setting an example for the working-class worldwide that workers can produce and manage even better without a boss or owner.

Over the past four years, workers have battled against eviction threats and intimidation, but in the past few weeks the government and security forces representing the factory's old ownership have used tactics of torture and kidnapping – reminiscent of Argentina's military dictatorship (1976-1983) in which 30,000 people, mostly activists, were disappeared in the dirty war.

On March 4 four people kidnapped the wife of a Zanon worker. They forced her into a green Ford Falcon, a model of car security operatives used to kidnap activists during the dictatorship, sending a chilling reminder of the dirty war. They tortured her and cut her face, hands, arms and breasts. In response, this woman, who had never participated in a protest, led the march on International Women's Day in Neuqen.

British protest shuts down Coke depot

BY INDYMEDIA UK

A coalition of anti-capitalist activists and human rights campaigners blockaded Coca-Cola's distribution centre in Longwell Green, Bristol, March 4, preventing up to 30 lorries from entering or leaving the site for five hours. The action was in response to Coca-Cola's abuses of human rights, the environment and labour rights, especially in South America and India, and was part of an international boycott which was called in July 2003 by the Colombian Food and Beverage Workers Union, Sinaltrainal. The union has seen eight of its members assassinated in Colombia since 1989 and many others kidnapped, attacked and threatened.

Protesters arrived at the distribution centre at 4:30 a.m. Eight people formed a circle with their arms joined inside thick metal pipes known as "arm-locks." Each wore a large label naming one of the eight unionists who have been assassinated for resisting the casualisation of their workforce and for campaigning for decent working conditions.

The protesters were supported by a dozen activists who held banners and placards, handed out leaflets to Coca-Cola workers and passers-by explaining the reasons for the action, directed traffic and kept the arm-lock protesters safe. Workers at the plant were supportive of the protest. They told protesters they suffer from the same pressures as Coke workers in Colombia to give up union membership, work on casual contracts, and work more hours for less pay. The protesters also drew attention to Coca-Cola's crimes in other parts of the world, particularly in India where the company stands accused of causing severe water shortages in communities across the country, polluting groundwater around its bottling facilities, distributing its toxic waste as "fertilizer" to farmers, and selling drinks with levels of pesticides, including DDT, up to 30 times higher than EU standards.

Australian government demands right to kill workers

The federal government has introduced legislation to exempt government agencies from the Australian Capital Territory's new industrial manslaughter statute. The ACT is the first Australian province to make employers criminally responsible for workplace deaths caused by unsafe conditions.

Meanwhile, the Xstrata corporation continues to challenge New South Wales health and safety laws after it was fined AUS $1.47 million for causing the deaths of four coal miners at its Gretley mine Nov. 14, 1996. The company insists it can not be held to account for negligent (as distinct from intentional) act that lead to workers' deaths.

Go on strike, go to jail

Nigeria's senate has approved a six-month jail term for any health, aviation or essential services worker who participates in a strike. Instead, such workers would be limited to government arbitration panels.

The bill also limits unions' right to strike over non-workplace concerns. The Nigerian Labour Congress has mounted several strikes to protest government policy.

Other provisions would encourage formation of competing union federations, and limit unions' right to discipline members.